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MORALS IN WORLD HISTORY

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CHAPTER I

WHAT ARE MORALS?

THE word "moral" is derived from the Latin *mos*, plural *mores*, meaning "custom" or "manner." Morality, therefore, in its primary sense is conformity to the manners or customs of the people among whom we live. In order to live tolerably together, any human group must have customs, conventions, or, if you like, a rule of the road. Morality means keeping that rule of the road; immorality means breaking it.

Other moral terms in daily use have a similar significance. "Right" originally means straight; "wrong" means wrung or twisted. To do right, therefore, is to go straight, keeping to your own side of the social road; to do wrong is to go crooked and interfere with the traffic.

This is the primary meaning of right and wrong, moral and immoral. We shall see as we go on that it is not the whole meaning. There are cases, which everyone will remember, in which certain people have challenged the current morality, and in which we now think their challenge to have been justified. All reform movements (the movement for the abolition of slavery, for example) are of this nature. They declare the current morality to be in some respect immoral, and try to change it. The upholders of the old ways, for their part, consider the reformers immoral, and call them hard names. So they fight it out; and if the reformers win, posterity agrees with them, and they live in history. In this way the social rule of the road is changed. There will be more to say of that later on. For the present, the thing to remember is that morality is an affair of the manners and customs of some human group, and that where there is no human group the word "morality" is unmeaning.

It is important to be clear on this. For the above view of morality is not that which is usually taught to the young. The catechism of the Church of England, for example, bases morality on the ten commandments said to have been given by God to the Israelites in the time of Moses. It is disastrous that this kind of thing should be taught in schools. The danger of basing decent behaviour on a legend is that when children come to disbelieve

the legend, they may come to disbelieve in decent behaviour too. Fortunately most of us have been drilled to be decent independently of the legends taught at school. Only a small minority believe to-day in the Biblical story of the Exodus. A larger number, though still a minority, hold that morality depends on belief in a God, and that if people cease to believe in a God they, or anyhow their children after them, will become utterly unprincipled and society will go to pieces. It is important, therefore, that we should realize that morality does not depend on belief in a God. It depends on the existence of groups of people living together. Man has lived in some sort of group, and has therefore practised some sort of morality, ever since he was man; but he has not always believed in the sort of being we mean to-day by God. Belief in that sort of being arose in the course of human history from causes which we are learning to understand, and will disappear as time goes on, largely as a result of our understanding those causes. But human society, and therefore morality, will continue.

In all human groups children are drilled and trained from their earliest years to follow the way of life of the group. By this means conformity to the social rule of the group becomes instinctive or, as we say, a second nature in the majority of individuals. The question is often put by clerics and other professional moralists why, if we reject religious sanctions, we should consider other people's happiness. The question does not occur to the ordinary man or woman. The drilling which each of us undergoes from infancy—in the family, in the school, and in workaday life—teaches us to conform to the common rule. Indeed, on ordinary occasions it needs a greater effort to defy than to obey it. When Mariner, the explorer of the Tonga Islands, asked certain chiefs what motives they had for proper behaviour they replied, "The agreeable and happy feeling which a man experiences within himself when he does any good action, or conducts himself nobly or generously, as a man ought to do," and seemed surprised that the question should be asked.¹ Those unbaptized savages could have given points to many clergy of the Church of England.

Human groups vary enormously in structure and complexity; and the moral codes current in them, together with the degrees of pressure necessary to enforce those codes, vary correspondingly.

¹ Mariner's *Tonga*, quoted by Tuckett, *The Evidence for the Supernatural*, first edition, p. 253.

Tonga, when first visited by Englishmen, had no tools more complicated than the bow and arrow, no means of transport other than the canoe, only rudimentary class divisions, and no acute conflict of class interests. In such a society moral ideas are simple and admit of little or no dispute. Western society, on the other hand, is immensely complex. The business of keeping it going involves the most elaborate methods of production, distribution, and exchange, the extraction and transport of materials from the ends of the earth, the design and operation of complicated machinery, and the interaction at every turn of conflicting class and national interests. The morality or rule of the road for such a complex society has not been laid down. It has to be learnt by hard experience. Meanwhile we try to rub along with an outfit of moral maxims and of national and international law handed down from earlier epochs. We find that it does not fit the situation. There is a conflict of groups and of loyalties. Those groups which manage to impose their own standards require for their enforcement a machinery of coercion and propaganda (schools, churches, press, radio, law courts, prisons, police, armies, navies, air forces) which would have staggered the simple Tongans. In such circumstances we need not wonder that we are fighting a world war. We should take heart from the fact that ordinary men and women, thanks to their drilling in group life, display the amount of decency, kindness, and mutual aid which they do; and we should see in such men and women the rock on which the society of the future will be built.

Whatever the degree of complexity of human society, the morality current in it has as its function the survival and happiness of some social group (family, class, nation, mankind). If the individual is well trained and well adjusted to his group, its happiness coincides with his own, and the question why he should value other people's happiness does not arise. It may, however, happen, and very often happens in complex societies such as our own, that an individual is not well trained and not well adjusted to his group. In that case the ultimate sanction of morality is the ability of the group to protect itself against anti-social individuals by social pressure, legal penalties, and in extreme cases the death penalty.

But the complexity and the instability of civilization inevitably lead to ambiguity and conflict in moral ideas. Instances leap to the eye. Honesty is a virtue: that is to say, it is to the interest of the social group that its members shall deal fairly and tell the

truth one to another. Some exceptions to the rule are universally allowed; for example, no one would say that it was a duty to tell the truth to a ruffian who asked where his intended victim was. Apart, however, from such elementary cases as this, the path of duty is not always clear. We live in a society in which the livelihood and well-being of thousands depend on successful competition with business rivals. One of the chief weapons of business competition is advertisement. The usual tendency of advertisements is to assert or imply that the goods or services supplied by the advertising firm are better than those supplied by anyone else. It is obvious that in the great majority of cases such a statement cannot be true. Do we on that account regard the advertiser who makes the claim as dishonest? Some clerics and professional moralists, I grant, preach "truth in advertising." But the general public hardly expects it. The advertiser who confined himself to bald facts would place himself at a disadvantage in competition with rivals who allowed themselves the normal ration of hyperbole. We may wish that society were so organized that this were not the case; but things being as they are, we discount veracity in advertisements.

Again, murder is a crime: that is to say, the social group insists that its members shall respect one another's lives. But if anyone tries to kill me, I am allowed to kill him in self-defence; and if he succeeds in killing me, society will hang him to deter others from doing the like. Opinions differ as to the justification and necessity for capital punishment. I am not concerned here with that question. The fact, however, that the majority who uphold capital punishment have usually viewed with repulsion the executioner who carries it out shows a certain inconsistency in moral ideas on the subject.

We meet with an even deeper conflict of ideas when we come to the question of war. How far does the social group, the lives of whose members I am required to respect, extend? For some purposes it extends to all mankind. If I go to a friendly country and kill the first foreigner I see, my countrymen will condemn me. But if a soldier, sailor, or airman, under orders, kills subjects of an enemy country, his countrymen approve him. Obviously, therefore, the social group to which I am bound does not extend to foreigners with whom my country is at war. Pacifists object to this restriction and assert that the taking of human life is in no case justifiable. Vegetarians go even further and reprobate the

killing of animals for food. Here we have a clear case of ambiguity and conflict in the moral sphere.

Take lastly the question of slavery. The ancient world, including such elevated thinkers as Plato and Aristotle, believed it right that some men should own other men as slaves. The Bible nowhere explicitly repudiates slavery, and, in places, expressly sanctions it. Men of the highest character continued to justify it down to the nineteenth century. Followers of Nietzsche are found to justify it to-day. Yet the moral sentiment of the overwhelming majority of civilized mankind now condemns it, and its revival on a massive scale by Germany during the present war has done more than anything else to steel ordinary men and women against compromise with Nazism. Here, then, is a case in which the conscience of normal human beings to-day pronounces wrong what it formerly pronounced right.

These instances point to the conclusion that moral values are not absolute, but relative. In this respect they differ from what we call the external, material, or objective world. The qualities of the latter are evident to all normal people; thus anyone with eyes can see that the sea is blue, and anyone with intelligence can appreciate the evidence that the earth is round. These, to borrow a term from Professor Hogben, are *public* facts. Moral values are not public facts in this sense. Many philosophers, notably Plato and Kant, have thought that they were. But the important differences between the moral standards of the ancients, the Middle Ages, and the modern world, and of different groups in the same historic era, show this to be illusion. Moral values may commend themselves to a given group of people and be regarded by that group as objective and self-evident, and yet be utterly reprobated by another group. Moral values derived from different groups may conflict even in one individual, as in the Agamemnon of Aeschylus, torn between duty to his country and duty to the daughter whom the prophet bids him sacrifice.

“ ‘Twere hard to disobey,
These words the elder chieftain spake that day,
‘ But were’t not hard on the altar-step to stand
And stain with virgin streams a father’s hand? . . .
Which way I turn is fraught with evil still,
No course exempt from ill.”¹

Hegel truly observes that the essence of tragedy is the conflict, not between right and wrong, but between right and right.

¹ *Agamemnon*, 205 ff., translated by Lewis Campbell.

The relation between the individual and the social group has been compared by many thinkers, notably Herbert Spencer, to that between the organic cell and the individual of which it is part. A human or other living body consists of billions of microscopic cells, every one of which lives, feeds, grows, multiplies by subdivision, and fulfils a function in the economy of the body. Each one of us is thus a co-operative commonwealth of cells. In the same way, it is suggested, the human individual lives, feeds, grows, reproduces his kind, and fulfils a function as producer, distributor, ruler, educator, or what not, in the economy of society. An anti-social individual is rarely happy for long. He is like a diseased cell in an organism, disintegrated from the whole of which he is a part. Religion in its widest sense, when we have sifted out of it all that belongs to this or that particular age or region, is a manifestation of our need of integration with something larger and more enduring than ourselves. From the beginning of history man has lived in social groups of one sort or another; and a moral sense of some sort is part of his mental make-up. The inner compulsion which we experience in our moral life was explained by Kant as the imperative of a "practical reason" identical in all rational beings. It is better explained as the imperative of a social group, and its ambiguities and anomalies as due to the conflict of competing social groups.

The analogy between society and an organism must not be strained. There is as yet no stable and perfectly integrated social group. Hence there is as yet no practicable and unambiguous code of morality for all mankind. We are still in the jungle, and have made, at most, incipient clearings in it. In the study of ethics we are dealing, not with the public, objective, material world, in which the sea is blue and the earth round for everyone who troubles to inspect them, but with the reactions of men and women to that world and to one another, conditioned by a society which is still in the making. Hence we are neither purely individual nor purely social beings. If we aim only at our own happiness as such, it eludes us. If we use ourselves up for a purpose larger and more enduring than our private happiness, we are more likely to be happy. But there is no agreement yet as to that purpose.

It is comforting to weak spirits to cry peace where there is no peace, to rest in time-honoured dogmatism, and to believe that the whole duty of man has been revealed to him once for all by

God speaking through conscience. On this showing all human maladjustments and miseries, down to and including the present war, have been due to failure to follow conscience. It is a simple view, but it will not work. The anti-social type, the purely selfish individual, is no doubt a terrible nuisance. But the untroubled fanatic, the individual who has achieved a false integration, who uses up himself and others for a purpose larger, indeed, and more enduring than himself, but reactionary and antagonistic to the evolution of a well-ordered world, can be more terrible still. We are suffering to-day more from men of this sort than from any common or garden criminal. That is what makes the appeals of archbishops for less selfishness so pitifully inept. Unselfishness is not enough: in some forms it can be a worse tyrant than self.

The nature of morals, as of most human institutions, can best be examined by reviewing them historically. In the following chapters we shall do this, and shall see how successive changes in moral theory and practice have come about.

CHAPTER II

PRIMITIVE MAN

IF we go back far enough in human history we arrive at a time when man was a primitive savage with very little command over nature, possessed of rudimentary tools and of some sort of articulate speech, acquainted with the use of fire, and subsisting on fruit, nuts, roots, and such small animals as he could catch. Later he invented weapons and became a hunter. The domestication of animals and the cultivation of plants for food came later still.

Some eminent thinkers, notably Hobbes, have conjectured that the primitive state of man was a "war of all against all." Had it been so, not only would the life of man have been, as Hobbes said, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short," but he could not have survived in the struggle for existence against beasts of prey and the rigours of the Ice Age. Even in the food-gathering stage men and women lived in social groups which practised mutual aid. The morality of the primitive group or horde is not essentially different from the herd-instinct in lower animals; but such as it is, it is part and parcel of man's evolutionary equipment.

The nature of the primitive human group has been and is the subject of much controversy. We are, however, in a position to say certain things about it with confidence. In the first place the primitive group was not the family as we know it. In the Bible the first human group consists of a married pair, Adam and Eve. They and the sons and daughters born to them constitute the first patriarchal family. It was long assumed that this family, with its male head and its subjection of women, had persisted as the foundation of society throughout human history. But we know now that the patriarchal family is not the oldest type of human group. In the earliest societies the part played by the father in procreation is unknown. This is as we should expect; for the discovery of a connection between events separated by an interval of nine months was a scientific feat beyond the powers of our earliest ancestors. Even in our own day there are people—e.g., the Central Australian tribes and the Trobriand islanders in Melanesia—who are ignorant of the nature of paternity. In such

societies the father, even if he lives with the mother, is not the head of the family.¹ There is conclusive evidence that the earliest human group consisted, not of father, mother, and their descendants, but of a mother and her descendants in the female line, no other line of descent being known.

There are abundant traces of this in ancient literature. The Greek historian Herodotus mentions tribes (the Massagetae in Central Asia, the Agathyrsi in Transylvania, the Nasamones and others in Libya) who have wives in common, and notes that the Lycians trace their descent in the female line. The Greeks were conscious that their own society had not always been patriarchal, and tried to explain the change. When peoples who have not reached the stage of scientific explanation wish to account for some natural phenomenon or social custom of whose real cause they are ignorant, they do so by a myth. The Athenians, for example, related that in the time of king Cecrops the god Poseidon and the goddess Athena had contended for the possession of Attica. Their claims were put to the vote; and the women, being in a majority, carried the day for the goddess. To appease Poseidon, Cecrops deprived women of the vote and instituted patriarchal marriage and descent in the male line.² This story, though unhistorical, shows that the patriarchal family was regarded at Athens as something requiring explanation.

The most famous instance in ancient literature of the clash between mother-right and father-right is that in the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus. In the drama Agamemnon has been killed by his wife Clytaemnestra; and their son, Orestes, in obedience to the god Apollo, has avenged his father by killing his mother. For this he is hunted by the Eumenides or Furies, ancient goddesses whose function is to punish the murder of kindred. To his question why they did not hunt Clytaemnestra while she lived, they answer:

“No tie of blood bound her to whom she slew.”

Apollo defends Orestes before the Areopagus (the supreme court of Athens) by denying that mother and son are blood relations:

“She who is called the mother of the child
Is not its parent, but the nurse of seed
Implanted in begetting. He that sows
Is author of the shoot, which she, if heaven
Prevent not, keeps as in a garden-ground.”³

¹ In Fiji father and son are not considered relations.

² Harrison, *Themis*, second edition, p. 262.

³ Translated by Lewis Campbell.

This piece of bad biology does not convince us, but it convinces Athena, who presides at the trial; and Orestes is acquitted. In this story the Eumenides stand for the primitive matrilineal group; the younger gods, Apollo and Athena, stand for the patriarchal family and city-state of classical Greece; and the tragedy dramatizes the conflict between the two.

Frazer, in *The Golden Bough*,¹ points out that among the legendary "kings" (more properly, chief priests and military leaders) of ancient Rome not one was succeeded by his son, but that three were succeeded by their sons-in-law. This in his opinion points to inheritance in the female line. In classical Rome the patriarchal family was well established; but there, as elsewhere, it seems to have supplanted an older matrilineal group. In Britain, as late as the seventh century A.D., according to Bede, succession in the Pictish royal families went in the female line.

The significance of such facts in ancient times was first pointed out to the modern world by Bachofen in a work published two years after Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Independently Lewis H. Morgan was discovering traces of mother-right among the Iroquois Indians, with whom he went to live and into one of whose tribes he was adopted. Morgan found that each Iroquois tribe was divided into a number of clans or groups based on common descent in the female line, the members of every such group being bound together for mutual protection and forbidden to marry within the group. Marriage, which could only take place between members of different matrilineal groups, was loosely monogamous; but by a curious anomaly all paternal uncles among the Iroquois were called "father" and all maternal aunts "mother," with other similar oddities of nomenclature. Morgan ascertained that other American Indians and many peoples of other continents followed this practice. Later he found in Hawaii a system which threw light on the custom. Here a number of men belonging to one exogamous group had as wives in common a number of women belonging to another exogamous group; and the offspring of this "group marriage" were regarded as their common children. This system, though moribund, still existed in the first half of the nineteenth century in Hawaii and other Pacific islands. A very similar marriage system was found by Julius Caesar among the ancient Britons, except that here a rough attempt was made to identify the father of the child.² Morgan infers that an original

¹ Abridged edition, pp. 152 ff.

² Caesar, *Gallie War*, v, 14.

state of promiscuity gave place successively to group-marriage, loose monogamy, and the patriarchal family.

This inference is borne out by the evidence of mythology. What we should call incestuous unions are often attributed to early gods and goddesses. In Egypt, Osiris and Isis are a wedded brother and sister. In Greece, Earth and Heaven are mother and son, but also lovers. Kronos and Rhea, Zeus and Hera, Zeus and Demeter, are cases of the union of brother and sister. In the *Odyssey* the wind-god Aeolus marries his six daughters to his six sons. These, of course, are not historical persons: they stand for the powers of nature—earth, sky, fertility, wind, and storm. But the fact that they are represented in the myth by pairs so related shows that in the remote age when those stories originated (probably long before they were written down) such unions inspired no repulsion. People do not usually go out of their way to make their gods and goddesses disgusting. If mythology has any anthropological significance it bears out Morgan's theory of primitive promiscuity.

This, of course, is at present far from being the unanimous finding of anthropologists. Morgan's theories met, and still meet, with a volume of resistance comparable to that which in the last century encountered Darwin's theory of the descent of man. Our *amour propre* rejects the notion that our ancestors practised promiscuity, just as it rejects the notion that earlier still they had tails and lived in trees. Such eminent anthropologists as Westermarck, Crawley, Andrew Lang, and Malinowski stand out for the primacy of the patriarchal family, Lang even going so far as to deny that group marriage ever existed as an institution.¹ Such questions, however, are to be decided on the whole of the available evidence. It is to be noted that the discoveries of Fison, Howitt, Baldwin Spencer and Gillen, in Australia, in the main corroborate Morgan, and that his views are supported in varying degrees by Aveling, Vinogradoff, Jane Harrison, Briffault, and Rivers.

Critics of Morgan are able to point to the fact that no existing savage society is sexually promiscuous. The majority of savage societies, in fact, are exogamous—that is to say, sex relations are banned between persons belonging to the same clan or kinship group. Exogamy survives in civilized society in the prohibition of incest. In savage society it is closely linked with another

¹ Lang, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, article "Family." It is remarkable that Lang ignores the evidence of Caesar.

institution, namely totemism, or the identification of each clan with a particular animal or vegetable species—a system of immense importance for the study of religious origins.

“Totem” is an American Indian word denoting the clans or kinship groups which make up a tribe, and hence, by transference, the animal or plant after which each clan is named. Totemism is found among a wide range of primitive peoples in America, Polynesia, Australia, Asia, and Africa; and there are vestigial survivals among Indo-Europeans and Semites. The most perfect extant examples are found among the natives of Australia. The connection between the totem-clan and the totem-species is peculiarly close. The clan believe that they are descended from the totem-species and that they pass into it at death. They may even be credited with the power of appearing in its form during life. They are forbidden to eat their totem except on certain ceremonial occasions, when a little of the totem is eaten and dances are performed to promote its increase. Some Australian tribes believe that their ancestors habitually ate their totem, but for one reason or another left it off.

Authorities differ widely on the origin of totemism—indeed, we might almost say that there are as many opinions on the matter as there are authorities. The most probable view seems to be that which explains it by man’s practical interest in his food supply. On this showing, the first stage in the evolution of totemism was when the primitive human group made their staple food of a particular species in their locality. That species was then the totem of the group. Primitive man expressed his dependence on the animal or plant he ate by saying that he *was* that animal or plant.¹ The earliest totems were plants or small animals; for in the lowest stage of savagery man had not the weapons necessary to hunt and kill animals of any size. But he was always hungry, and in course of time, spurred by necessity, he invented weapons and took to the chase. To him this was an adventure into the unknown. His weapons were primitive; and he had not that habitual mastery of animals which leads civilized man to regard them as brutes created for his benefit. To primitive man they were beings like himself whom he must hunt and kill to absorb their magic and live. Hence the collective character of ancient hunting. Hence the ceremonial dances by which the savage seeks to promote the increase of his totem. Hence, too, the

¹ Compare the German proverb, “*Man ist was er isst.*”

quaintly apologetic attitude often adopted to the animal killed. "Do not bear us a grudge," said the Ottawa Indians to their totem-bear, "because we have killed you. You are sensible, you see that our children are hungry. They love you, they wish to put you into their body. Is it not glorious to be eaten by the sons of a chief?"¹ The totem-animal is necessary to the group; therefore he is one of the group and must be civilly treated even when you eat him.

The second stage in the evolution of totemism began when the totem-group grew too big and split up in search of new food supplies. The different groups might separate entirely; or they might remain in the same district, each specializing in one article of food. In this way arose a larger and more complex social group, the *tribe*, based on division of labour between two or more smaller groups or *clans*. As the tribe grew larger the subdivision might be repeated: we find in many cases tribes consisting of two or more intermediate groups (known to anthropologists as "phratries") each comprising two or more clans. Each clan had now its separate totem-species, and its spells and rites for promoting the increase of that species; but instead of eating its own totem it exchanged it for the produce of the other clans. The taboo on each clan eating its own totem thus helped to keep the tribe together.²

Since primitive man drew no radical distinction between animals and human beings, he saw no special turpitude in cannibalism. This practice probably arose owing to the continual uncertainty of food supplies in the early stages of hunting, and was continued in later times for magical reasons. In tribal wars the obvious thing to do with a slain enemy was to eat him and so, it was supposed, make his strength and valour your own; and you did the same with dead fellow-tribesmen whose qualities you wanted to absorb.

Exogamy, the other salient feature of primitive society, has been variously explained. McLennan, who first drew attention to it, supposed it to originate in a custom of killing female children at birth. The group doing this would of course have to go elsewhere for its women. Female infanticide, however, is not sufficiently

¹ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged edition, p. 522. Harrison, *Themis*, second edition, p. 140. Other instances are given by these authors.

² Malinowski, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, thirteenth edition, article "Anthropology." Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens*, chapter I.

widespread to account for exogamy, and for obvious reasons can never have even approached universality.

Morgan, who discovered exogamy independently of McLennan, accounted for it by natural selection. Groups, he argued, which invigorated their stock by new blood would have a natural advantage over those which degenerated by inbreeding. A similar explanation is given by Westermarck.

A third explanation of exogamy is that tentatively sketched by Darwin in *The Descent of Man* and developed by Lang and Atkinson. This view postulates a primitive patriarchal family consisting of a single grown man, his wife or wives, and their children. The man, being jealous and greedy, claimed unlimited rights over all womenfolk in the group and drove out his growing sons to fend for themselves. Paternal jealousy thus established the rule of exogamy for the sons. This theory is supported by Freud, who finds in it an illustration of the working of the Oedipus complex. Freud improves on the original story by conjecturing that "one day the expelled brothers joined forces, slew and ate the father, and thus put an end to the father horde." Instead, however, of proceeding, as we should expect, to share out the women, the parricides gave themselves up to remorse and perpetuated the taboo, which has remained in force to this day!

Actually there is no evidence that this primitive patriarch and his harem ever existed. In primitive societies the nature of paternity is unknown, and there is strong reason to think that the emotion of jealousy, as we understand it, is also unknown. Group marriage, such as Caesar found in Britain and to which Morgan testifies in Hawaii, is plainly incompatible with jealousy. The Eskimos, men and women, are entirely without it, and enjoy complete sexual freedom before and after marriage: an Eskimo lends his wife to a guest as a matter of hospitality. Among the Todas of Southern India, according to Rivers, the brothers of a family share a wife between them. In ancient Sparta a woman might have several husbands. The "jealous brute" of Lang, Atkinson, and Freud is no true primitive, but a projection into the prehistoric past of a type that emerged only when private property had created a vested interest in legitimate issue and in female chastity as a means thereto.

We have seen that the totem taboo probably arose as a means of keeping the tribe together after the component clans had specialized in producing different articles of food. Thomson, in *Aeschylus*

and Athens, connects the origin of exogamy with this development. A clan, as we have seen, originally consisted of people claiming common descent in the female line. Exogamy ensured that husband and wife should be of different clans, and enabled a man and his wife's relations to pool their hunting lore. "The men lived with the clan into which they married, and were obliged to surrender their products to the members of the clan. Thus, the practice of getting husbands from other clans enabled each to extend its diet by obtaining access to foods which it did not produce itself. The initial function of exogamy was to circulate the food supply."¹ This is to some extent borne out by the evidence of Howitt and Rivers on the customs of certain Australian and Melanesian tribes, which lay down the exact proportions in which a hunter is to divide his kill between his wife's relations, his own relations, and himself. We may find it difficult to conceive how a taboo imposed originally as an economic convenience could have developed into one of the strongest inhibitions in human nature. But time works wonders, and the anthropologist has many thousands of years to play with.

A further factor making for exogamy would be its value in promoting tribal cohesion. An inbreeding clan would tend to keep itself to itself and to hold aloof in tribal emergencies. It would thus sooner or later become an easy prey to enemies. By encouraging intermarriage between its clans a tribe would preserve its solidarity and be better fitted to survive in the struggle for existence. In course of time, if not at first, this would lead to a positive taboo on inbreeding.

To whatever cause we attribute the triumph of exogamy over promiscuity, it is clear that such stringent taboos as this and its companion, the totem taboo, presuppose a strong authority to impose them. Such an authority existed in the magician or medicine-man. The magician seems originally to have been simply the head (at first, no doubt, the oldest member) of the primitive human group, who on account of his experience took the lead in such ceremonies as the magical multiplication of the totem-species. The magician might be a woman, but, as the office carried with it leadership in hunting and war, was usually a man. His prestige would depend on his apparent success. A practitioner who failed to avert famine would be insulted, beaten, or killed. But a run of luck would earn the magician a tremendous

¹ Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens*, p. 17.

reputation. In this way arose what Frazer describes as "the oldest artificial or professional class in the evolution of society."¹ The foundations of priestcraft are laid in magic. The magician is credited with power over the forces of nature; in fact to the savage he *is* a force of nature; he is both embryo priest and embryo god. But only while his luck holds! If it no longer holds, or if his powers fail, it is expedient that he die for his people and that another (commonly one who has slain him in single combat) take his office.

When the primitive group developed into a tribe, the heads of clans became the council of the tribe, and the most powerful of them became the tribal chief. This office was not originally hereditary. The position of the chief depended on the successful discharge of his largely magical functions. If he failed to discharge them, or if illness or age threatened to prevent him from discharging them, he was killed. He had no police or standing army to enforce his will. He ruled by consent. Nevertheless, while he held office he enjoyed to the full the magical prestige of a primitive medicine-man. The magician-chief and his council would use that prestige to procure the adoption of measures necessary to keep the tribe together. To their initiative, ratified by the experience of generations, we may attribute the growth of such institutions as the totem taboo and exogamy.

Opinions differ as to the part played in primitive society by war. The usual view is that every tribe was originally in a state of war with every other tribe and that, in a word, savagery and ferocity are synonymous. Of late years, however, the school of anthropologists represented by Elliot Smith, Perry, and Rivers have cast considerable doubt on this view. It is pointed out that during far the greater part of man's history on earth—that is to say, during the food-gathering stage—he had not the weapons with which to wage any war worth the name. His teeth and nails are not, like those of carnivorous animals, adapted to combat; and the rude flint and bone weapons of the Old Stone Age cannot have been very destructive. It is likely enough that, when man had begun to hunt animals, his quest for food brought him into armed conflict with men of other tribes, and that men who for any reason could not find sexual partners in their own tribe raided other tribes for women. But there is no evidence that primitive man loved fighting for its own sake. Nearly all savage tribes have to stimulate

¹ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged edition, p. 105.

themselves by a war-dance before going on an expedition. Rivers draws attention to the fact that in Melanesia tribal wars are fought with a punctilio hardly compatible with natural ferocity: the tribes fight till one or more men have been killed on each side, and then stop and exchange gifts.¹ Frazer points out that in many parts of the world victorious warriors, instead of being welcomed and feasted, are under a taboo and obliged to purify themselves. In Timor, in Central Celebes, and in some African and North American tribes, people even mourn for their slain enemies, much as the Ottawa Indians apologized to the slain bear.² This does not support the theory of man's natural bloodthirstiness. It suggests that war, like hunting, was an adventure into the unknown forced upon him by the grim necessity of living.

¹ Rivers, *Psychology and Ethnology*, pp. 9, 295-296.

² Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged edition, pp. 212-215.

CHAPTER III

THE BIRTH OF CIVILIZATION

WE have watched primitive man advance slowly from food-gathering to hunting, from the homogeneous group or horde to the tribe, and evolve a rudimentary social structure and division of function. As this evolution extended over a period of hundreds of thousands of years, primitive society may be described as almost static. Its morality, while presenting one or two puzzles, is explicable as an evolutionary adaptation of human behaviour to the conditions of tribal life. Had society been quite static, morality would also have been static.

But a few thousand years ago man took a series of steps forward which gradually disintegrated tribal society and ended by upsetting tribal morality. The invention of pottery improved the art of cooking and extended the range of diet. The domestication of animals on the grassy plains of Asia and Europe increased both man's food supply and his mobility. Milk was an important addition to his diet and was beneficial to growing children. Man no longer depended for existence on the chase. Woollen clothing worked by the women enabled him to brave colder climates; and the camel and the ox-waggon extended his power of locomotion.¹ For the first time in history some human groups began to produce more food than was necessary for their own maintenance—a fact which paved the way for slavery. Next (but whether before or after the domestication of animals is uncertain) man learnt to cultivate plants for food—garden plants first, then wheat and barley in the great river valleys of the Old World, maize in parts of America. Lastly, the smelting of copper and tin improved his tools and weapons. These developments enabled man to settle permanently in villages and introduced a sharper division of labour between the sexes. Man hunted, fought, minded the livestock, or ploughed and sowed the fields, while woman cooked, spun, wove, and tended her garden and her children.

So far, so good. But how did the primitive morality of the

¹ In America, until the coming of Columbus, there were only two domesticated species, the llama and the alpaca. Progress was therefore slower there.

hunting horde fit the new conditions? It did not fit them at all. In the first place, man began to assert a right of property in his individual product. In the old days he had hunted collectively and eaten his kill collectively, for the simple reason that he was too weak and his weapons too primitive to do anything else. After animals were domesticated, the herds were originally the common property of the tribe or clan. So, when agriculture began, was the land. But as productivity increased, the traditional claims of the group conflicted more and more with the new claims of the individual. From an early date arable land was assigned by periodical allotment to individual cultivators. In the *Iliad* the fighting between Greeks and Trojans is compared to a village wrangle over such an allotment:

“As when two neighbours, in a common field,
Each line in hand, within a narrow space,
About the limits of their land contend.”¹

Similarly the three sons of Kronos, the gods Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades, are depicted as having divided the world among them by lot—the proceedings of gods being modelled, as usual, on those of men.² By a natural process cattle, too, came to be regarded as private property, though pastures remained common.

The second breach made in primitive morality was slavery. Agriculture and the care of flocks and herds meant hard work; and nothing was easier than to set conquered enemies to that work and live on the produce of their labour. Cannibalism became disreputable: a better use had been found for enemies than to eat them. Slavery, from a humane point of view, was at its inception a clear advance; but in the long run its moral effects were disintegrating. Morality meant conformity to the manners and customs of a social group. To what social group did the slave belong? He had been torn from his own, but had not been assimilated to that of his masters. He was to prove a less digestible morsel than in the old days when he had been simply eaten.

Thirdly, man's growing mastery of nature led to a growing knowledge of himself. In the more advanced communities he knew by now the nature of paternity, and therefore took an interest in his own children. As a natural consequence, group marriage gave place to a loose monogamy such as Morgan found among the Iroquois, or such as existed in ancient Sparta or among

¹ *Iliad*, xii, 421 ff., translated by Lord Derby.

² *Ibid.*, xv, 185 ff.

the Welsh and Irish before the English conquest.¹ Men who had acquired private property in cattle, slaves, and weapons inevitably sought to transmit such possessions to their children. This was incompatible with the existence of the matrilineal clan. Mother-right meant that children belonged to their mother's clan, not to their father's, and that when a man died, his property, in order to remain in the clan, passed to his nearest clan-relations—e.g., his brothers and sisters or his sisters' children—but not to his own children. If the proud father wished to leave his property to his children, mother-right had to go. Man's ownership of cattle, slaves, and weapons gave him the whip hand. So in due course, at different periods in different parts of the world, inheritance was shifted to the male line. A relic of the transition exists in the curious custom found in many parts of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, and known as *couvade*, by which a father at the birth of his child takes to his bed, fasts, is waited on hand and foot, and perhaps even groans in mock pain. This ritual is barbaric man's way of insisting that the child is as much his as the mother's. At the same time, in order to secure the legitimacy of children, the bond of marriage was tightened and chastity imposed as a duty on women—not on men. Thus, along with private property and slavery, arose the patriarchal family—the man with his house, his wife, his manservant, his maidservant, his ox, his ass, and everything that was his. Only in a few pockets secluded from civilization—principally in certain African, American, Australian, and Melanesian tribes—has mother-right on a diminishing scale persisted to the present day.²

Fourthly, the transition from a hunting to a pastoral or agricultural society rendered the old totemism unmeaning. Man could no longer think of animals as his relations and equals when he had domesticated them and put them to his use. Totemistic rites and taboos continued; but their content and significance underwent a

¹ The monkish author of *Gesta Henrici Secundi* justifies Henry's conquest of Ireland by blackening the morals of the Irish. "Most of them," he says, "had as many wives as they wished, and were even wont to have their own sisters to wife." Allowing for the writer's bias, there is ample evidence that the marriage tie was lax.

² The patriarchal society depicted in the Old Testament shows a curious trace of mother-right in Gen. xx, 12. Abraham says of Sarah: "She is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife." The story was evidently first told in a matrilineal society, where Abraham and Sarah would be of different clans and therefore free to marry.

change. The ordinary man or woman had long forgotten the origin of totemism and no longer assisted actively in the rites. They had become the peculiar province of the custodians of tribal tradition, the chief and his council of medicine-men. The totem-animal was no longer regarded as itself the ancestor of the clan or tribe, but as sacred to the tribal god or goddess—an invisible ancestor or ancestress whose authority the visible chief claimed to exercise. In matrilineal societies the deity was naturally a mother-goddess. As the tribe became patriarchal, a father-god became the rule. As the primitive food-gatherers and hunters had made totems of the plants and animals on which they lived, so in agricultural communities the mother-goddess was associated with the earth that bore the crop, and the father-god with the rain that fertilized the soil. As the chief had formerly been charged with the magical multiplication of the totem, so now he was responsible for the sex-ritual that made the rain fall and the crops grow; and as of old, when his powers failed he was killed in order that a successor with unimpaired vigour might discharge his duties. Or he might be killed at the end of a fixed term in order that his magical potency might pass into the ground still intact.

The day came when some enterprising chief decided to enjoy the advantages of office without its liabilities. He refused to die when his time was up. Owing to the frequency of tribal wars, the growth of slavery, and the rise of the patriarchal family he was in a strong position. It is inconvenient to kill your general in the middle of a campaign; the chief, as war leader, received the lion's share of slaves and other booty; and as head of a family he had absolute power over his children. He was thus able to drive a bargain with his council and his tribe. If he stood well with them, he could arrange for a slave to be sacrificed in his place; if not so well, a son. Human sacrifice is one of the grim by-products of progress. Rare among savages strictly so called, it became endemic as a direct result of man's advance to an agricultural economy, and was to reach a hideous apogee in the theocratic civilizations of the Semites and the Aztecs.

These birth-pangs of civilization—the passage from food-gathering to food-production, from relative peace to chronic war, from primitive communism to private property and slavery, from mother-right to father-right, from magic to religion—made a deep imprint on folk-lore. Hesiod, the peasant poet of ancient Greece, sang of the golden age when Kronos was king and the earth bore

fruit of herself, and the tribes of men lived without toil; and how Zeus in his anger hid the means of life and sent Pandora the temptress to bring labour and sorrow into the world; and how the golden age yielded place to the ages of silver, bronze, and iron, and men wronged one another and filled the earth with violence and war.¹ Similarly, the Hebrews, following some earlier Babylonian source, fabled that the first man and woman lived happily on the fruit of trees until man, tempted by woman, ate of the tree of knowledge; that Jahveh, lest they should be as gods, cast them out of Eden, dooming man thenceforth to sweat for his bread, and woman to bear children in sorrow and to be subject to her husband; and that the age of innocence then gave place to the age of blood and violence, the first tiller of the ground being the first murderer.² Both myths connect social disharmony with agriculture and with the wrath of a jealous father-god; both regard work as a curse; and both, having arisen in a patriarchal society, put the blame for the whole business on woman.

From time to time the ancient world sought release from its maladjustments in a ritual revival of the lost age of gold. On these occasions, such as the Babylonian festival of the Sacaea (sacred to the mother-goddess Ishtar), the Greek festivals of Kronos, and the Roman Saturnalia, masters and slaves ate together or even changed places, the masters waiting on the slaves. But it was a hollow reconciliation. After the festival man resumed his chains: the condemned wretch who had played lord of misrule at the Sacaea paid for his fun with torture and death.

The patriarchal family, too, had to compromise with older marriage customs. This seems to be the meaning of an institution which prevailed in antiquity all over the Near and Middle East from the Mediterranean to the Ganges, and which may once have been universal in agricultural societies. By it women were required to surrender themselves to a stranger at least once, and in some cases many times, in the temple of the mother-goddess in order to qualify for marriage. This custom exemplifies in a signal degree the relativity of moral ideas. Christian authorities can see in it only "licentious conduct," an "extravagant sexual orgy" to be expected of heathen, who anyhow were no better than they should be.³ Even a scientific anthropologist like Malinowski

¹ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 42-201.

² Gen. ii, 4-iv.

³ See, for example, Shadwell, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, article "Prostitution."

explains away such customs as a "regulated and limited licence" which ancient society, judiciously anticipating psycho-analysis, allowed in order to deal with the "disruptive forces of sex."¹ But the people who practised it did not regard it as licentious or as entailing any dishonour to the women concerned. A marble inscription of the second century A.D., found at Tralles, in Asia Minor, records the services, as temple prostitutes, of generation after generation of women of a certain family, much as we to-day might commemorate the services of Sunday-school teachers.² Those who think that morality is dictated by God or by pure reason may make of such facts what they can.

The truth is that the patriarchal family, with its subjection of women, was not yet the rule in the early stages of agricultural society. Under mother-right sex relations were loose, though gradually tending towards monogamy; and in accordance with the principle of sympathetic magic it was believed that they promoted the fertility of nature. When, therefore, father-right came in and man's interest in legitimate issue urged him to impose chastity on the female sex, his interest in an abundant crop forced him to compromise. Girls were accordingly enjoined to do their duty to the mother-goddess before they were married, and after that their duty to their husbands. In process of time, however, the compromise conflicted more and more with man's proprietary interest in his womenfolk. As urban civilization developed, the service of the mother-goddess was gradually relegated to slaves and sank in social esteem, becoming in the end indistinguishable from commercial prostitution.

The development of civilization is always uneven. While agriculture took root and flourished in fertile river basins, the tribes of less fertile tracts remained pastoral. Like the agricultural populations, they passed from primitive communism to private property in cattle and slaves, and from mother-right to father-right. The tending of cattle, however, is easier work than agriculture; and pastoral societies did not, therefore, evolve the intricate magical rites characteristic of societies that tilled the soil. The pastoral chief was more a military leader than a magician. Pastoral tribes on the fringe of agricultural societies took to raiding the peasants whose wealth they envied and whose ways they

¹ Malinowski, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, thirteenth edition, article "Anthropology."

² Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged edition, p. 331.

despised. There was chronic enmity between the "desert" and the "sown." At the same time the nomad's larger range of movement multiplied intertribal contacts. Such contacts were not always hostile. They made trade possible; and in course of time large groups of tribes evolved a common language.

Thus a group of pastoral tribes in the Arabian desert, contiguous to the nascent civilizations of Iraq and Egypt, evolved the Semitic language from which Assyrian, Phoenician, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic are derived. Semitic scholars hold that Arabic is nearer than its sister languages to primitive Semitic, and that the original Semites, like the modern Arabs, were nomads. They were organized in tribes and clans based on common descent (familiar to us in the Biblical phrases "children of Israel," "children of Ammon," etc.), which in historical times was reckoned in the male line, though there is evidence that descent was originally matrilineal.¹ The way of life and beliefs of the Semitic tribes were marked by desert simplicity: the Hebrew word for "good" (*tob*) seems to have meant primarily "good to eat."² Only when they had become masters by conquest of the "fertile crescent" of Iraq, Syria, and Palestine did they become, like other conquerors, debased and cruel.

Another group of pastoral tribes in the Eurasian steppes evolved the Aryan language from which Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and the various Celtic, Teutonic, and Slavonic tongues are derived. This group of languages happens to be our own; and from its study we can discover a good deal about the way of life of these tribes when they were in mutual contact. We know, for instance, that they had domesticated animals, since names akin to our "cow," "ewe," "swine," and "hound" are common to the chief Indo-European languages. They had some knowledge of agriculture; but the fact that most of the cultivated plants are differently named in the different languages suggests that they had not gone far with it when they separated. Variants of our word "tree" are common to many Indo-European tongues; but specific names like "beech," "birch," etc., are so variously applied in different languages as to suggest that the primitive Aryans had not yet come to grips with problems of woodcraft. Like the Semites, they were

¹ E.g., feminine tribal names (Hagar, Rachel, etc.), and the marriage of Abraham to his half-sister, Sarah. See Benzinger, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, article "Kinship."

² Harrison, *Themis*, second edition, p. 139.

organized in patriarchal tribes and clans, but seem to have been originally matrilineal.¹ They worshipped a father-god whose name may be preserved in the Sanskrit "Dyaus" ("sky"), the Greek "Zeus," and the Latin "Dies-piter" or "Jupiter." The cultural level of the Aryans before their dispersal is also indicated by the fact that their language had a word for "hundred," but not for "thousand," and, like the languages of the Australian natives, had no future tense.

Civilization, however, did not begin with the Semitic or Aryan nomads, but in the great river valleys of the Nile, Euphrates, Tigris, Indus, and Hwang-ho, where the growth of agriculture and the consequent increase in food supply and population made a more complex social organization than the tribe both possible and necessary. When a local community, consisting perhaps of three or four tribes, met together to exchange their products, to deliberate, or to worship, a new unit, the *city*, came into being. The most powerful tribal chief became priest-king of the city, and his tribal god the god of the city. The best land was set apart for him, a temple built, and slaves assigned for his use. The temple was not only the city's place of worship, but its storehouse, and later, as trade developed and metal currency came into use, its bank. The needs of temple and city administration led to the invention of writing. With the first extant inscriptions (between 3000 and 4000 B.C. in Egypt and Iraq, and about two thousand years later in China) the passage from barbarism to civilization may be considered complete.

¹ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged edition, pp. 152-156. Thomson finds traces of family arrangements resembling those of the American Indians and other primitives (*Aeschylus and Athens*, app. II).

CHAPTER IV

EGYPT AND BABYLONIA

THE first significant event in recorded history is the union of Upper and Lower Egypt into a single kingdom, about 3400 B.C. Although few, if any, writings are prior to that date, Egypt must for centuries earlier have been a settled country populated by peasants using tools of wood, flint, or copper, but hardly acquainted with iron, and organized in numerous city-states, each with its priest-king, its temple, and its local god or goddess—usually a former tribal totem like Apis, the bull-god of Memphis, Hathor, the cow-goddess of Tentyra, or Khnum, the ram-god of Elephantine. The fusion of these city-states, first into the two kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt and then into one, was a new social phenomenon. The Pharaoh was a priest-king on a scale never before seen: he was the mediator between gods and men, responsible for the rise and fall of the Nile and for the growth of crops which that made possible, not in one tribe or in one city-state only, but in all Egypt. The priestly families of the local temples became a feudal nobility. In early times sacerdotal, military, and civil authority was combined in one person; in later times these functions were usually divided. Mother-right in Egypt was slow in giving place to father-right: inheritance through the mother was recognized, and succession (especially in the royal family) was kept in the male line by allowing marriage of brother and sister. Below kings, priests, and nobles were the people who carried them on their backs—the peasants, handicraftsmen, and slaves who tilled the land, made the pottery, tools, and weapons, and built the temples, tombs and Pyramids by which ancient Egypt is remembered to-day.

In Iraq, on the other side of the Arabian desert, a somewhat similar civilization, that of the Sumerians, had come into being. Here, too, a peasant population clustered round a number of city-states, each with its priest-king and its local god or goddess. The earliest extant inscriptions in Iraq and Egypt are roughly contemporary; but the two systems of writing (cuneiform and hieroglyphic) are unrelated, and the two civilizations appear to have arisen independently. The early contacts of the Sumerians,

in fact, seem not to have been with Egypt, but with the Indus valley, where inscribed seals have been found bearing characters somewhat resembling the oldest Sumerian writing.

Both Egypt and Iraq have always been liable to invasion from without. There is reason to think that Semitic nomads in prehistoric times penetrated Egypt in sufficient numbers to affect in some degree the language of its people; but the relation of Egyptian to the Semitic languages remains obscure. Iraq is geographically more exposed to attack; and from a remote period Semites disputed with Sumerians the mastery of the Euphrates and Tigris basin. One consequence of this was that the city-states of Iraq took longer than those of Egypt to unify into a kingdom. Another was the early rise in Iraq, through nomadic contacts, of a merchant class and of a complex commercial and legal system unparalleled in Egypt. In their theocratic character, however, and in the sharp line drawn between classes, the two civilizations were very similar.

In the earliest days of civilization the priestly class had already become conscious exploiters of mass ignorance and credulity. The primitive magician is not a charlatan: he *does* believe in his own power. But Egyptian and Babylonian priests no longer believed in the magical causation of natural phenomena. The proof lies in the fact that in both countries they had begun to discover their real causes. In Egypt, practical interest in the annual flooding of the Nile led the priests to measure the length of the year by a systematic observation of the heavens and laid the foundations of astronomy. We have tangible evidence of their attainments in the exact orientation of the Pyramids. In Babylonia, in observatories attached to the temples, the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies were worked out with considerable exactitude, and eclipses of the sun and moon foretold. In both countries the fertility of the soil was increased by an organized system of irrigating canals. The men who discovered and exploited these uniformities of nature and who planned and executed these irrigation works cannot have believed that the crops depended on a magic ritual performed by themselves or even by the king. Science, though as yet in its infancy and not yet disentangled from astrology, was on the march. But religion had become a vested interest. The truth was kept a dark secret; and barbaric beliefs and practices, including human sacrifice, were perpetuated as an engine of priestly power in societies to

whose real needs they no longer corresponded in the light of available knowledge.

There could hardly be a more signal mark than this of the disintegration of tribal society and the collapse of tribal morality. Primitive man is poor, weak, ignorant, at the mercy of nature, and therefore credulous; but his poverty, weakness, ignorance, and credulity are common to his whole group. In the earliest civilized societies we find a ruling class possessing relative wealth, power, and knowledge, progressively mastering the secrets and controlling the forces of nature, but of set policy fostering the ignorance and superstition of the masses. In such societies there is no common purpose and therefore no common morality, but a conflict of interest which sooner or later breaks out into open class struggle.

The learning of the priests was, of course, only relative. Most of their achievements were not scientific at all, but at best crude rationalizations of superstition. As such must be classed the humanization and reduction to an organized pantheon of the motley crowd of totem-gods inherited from the prehistoric past. So must that specifically Egyptian contribution to religion, the doctrine of human immortality. We saw in the last chapter that in early agricultural society it was the custom periodically to put the tribal chief to death in order that his virility might fertilize the earth. In primitive language the dead chief *was* the crop.¹ The Egyptians personified the crop as the god Osiris who was killed, dismembered, and buried, but rose again from the dead every year in the springing corn. For them, therefore, the dead chief or priest-king *was* Osiris. In historical times the king himself was not slain, a vicarious victim in the shape of a red-headed man (representing the ripe corn) being burnt in the harvest field and his ashes scattered with a winnowing-fan.² The king, however, managed to have the best of both worlds; and when he eventually died, and was buried, he still became in popular estimation Osiris, the corn-king, just as he had been when he really filled the bill. The priests took advantage of popular superstition to build up an elaborate cult of the dead Pharaoh. His body was mummified

¹ We get the same idea in modern slang when we speak of a dead person as "pushing up the daisies," and in the once popular song:

"And the roses and the posies
Fertilized by Clementine."

² Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged edition, pp. 378-380, 443, 476.

to prevent decay, and his tomb was made a residence worthy of him, furnished with food, drink, and treasure, adorned with pictures, and inscribed with incantations that his rest might be undisturbed by snakes, scorpions, or demons. The Pyramids, built out of immense blocks of limestone or granite, at a labour-cost that can only be conjectured, for the Pharaohs of the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth dynasties (about 3000-2400 B.C.), are the chief memorial of this exploitation of human ignorance and credulity.

Mummification was originally restricted to the kings. In course of time it was extended to the nobility in general. The Egyptian priests and *literati* were the dupes of their own propaganda and could not conceive that death would be the end for gentlemen of their quality. They were not metaphysicians; and the only immortality they could envisage was physical; hence the mummification. One day, they hoped, the shadowy ghost (*ka*) would return to the mummified corpse, and the dead would live again. Peasants, artisans, and slaves were not at this period regarded as immortal, and were left to moulder in unpretentious graves.

The intensive exploitation of the people in the Pyramid Age left Egypt a prey to social upheaval and foreign invasion. The records are meagre; but from recently discovered documents we can gather how the collapse struck the more intelligent *literati*. "The poor man," writes a priest of Heliopolis, "has no strength to save himself from him that is stronger than he." "Righteousness is cast out, and iniquity is in the midst of the council-hall." Others call for a good king who will put all to rights. "He brings coolness to the flame. It is said he is the shepherd of all men. There is no evil in his heart. . . . Where is he to-day? Does he sleep perchance? Behold, his might is not seen." "The people of his time shall rejoice; the son of man shall make his name for ever and ever. . . . Righteousness shall return to its place; unrighteousness shall be cast out." ¹

The Egyptian word *maat*, translated "righteousness" in these extracts, like the Greek word *dike* and our word "law," denoted rule or order, whether in the human or in the physical world.² As we saw at the beginning of this book, righteousness originally meant keeping the rules of the social group. But in societies

¹ Breasted, "History and Social Idealism," in *The Rationalist Annual*, 1936.

² Cf. Harrison, *Themis*, second edition, pp. 514-535.

such as that of Egypt, based on the exploitation of man by man, the social group is ill-defined; and therefore righteousness does not mean the same thing to everyone. To the slave-owner the slave was not a member of the social group. Righteousness therefore endorsed slavery, and meant in concrete cases handing back runaway slaves to their owners and punishing disobedience or rebellion. To the slave the righteousness of that procedure was not obvious. So, too, righteousness did not necessarily mean the same thing to the feudal noble and to the peasant or artisan. There is, however, no Chinese wall between social classes. Action and reaction between them are incessant. As the small man became articulate, the righteousness of the ruling class was inevitably attacked, and its more intelligent members became sensitive to such attack. Such fragments as those quoted above indicate that the voice of the peasant was here and there heard across the class-barrier. A time was to come in the ancient world when even the voice of the slave would be heard. But that time was not yet.

The period of upheaval ended by throwing up a tyrant, Khēti, who is said to have "done much injury to all the inhabitants" of Egypt. Under the eleventh and twelfth dynasties (about 2100–1800 B.C.) Egypt rose externally to new heights of prosperity and splendour, marked by victorious wars, great engineering works (such as the damming of Lake Moeris in the Fayum depression), and the usual output of temples, tombs and pyramids. Essentially nothing was changed. Egypt had set in a mould and become an old civilization, stereotyped in pattern and incapable of resolving the contradiction between technical achievement and traditional beliefs and institutions. The Egyptians increasingly sought compensation in religion for the maladjustments that seemed inescapable in life. The gods, who on the oldest monuments are represented pictorially by animals in conformity with their totemic origin, were progressively humanized. The dead and risen Osiris, the personification of the yearly crop, became the guarantor of eternal life, with whom every Egyptian who could afford mummification (not only the dead king) was now mystically identified. The collection of texts commonly known as the *Book of the Dead*, inscribed on sarcophagi of wood or stone and intended to ensure the welfare of the deceased in the next world, began to be composed about this time. Such preoccupation with another life is symptomatic of inability to solve the problems of this. After

the twelfth dynasty the Egyptians relapsed into disunion and civil war; and when a horde of Asiatic nomads, the Hyksos or "shepherd kings," fell upon them, about 1700 B.C., they succumbed without a blow.

The early history of Babylonia differs from that of Egypt mainly for geographical reasons. Iraq is more exposed than Egypt to foreign contacts, both warlike and peaceful. In Egypt we know of no foreign conquest in historical times prior to that of the Hyksos; but in Babylonia Sumerians and Semites were at grips from an early date. In Egypt such trade as there was seems to have been largely in foreign hands; but in Babylonia a native merchant class distinct from the ruling priesthood is very soon in evidence. Probably the Semitic settlers, who derived a knowledge of desert routes from their nomadic ancestry, were responsible for the rapid rise of Babylonian trade. After the unification of Iraq by Sargon of Accad, about 2800 B.C., the empire was linked up by roads, and a postal service, in which clay seals did duty for stamps, was established. Hegemony passed from city to city; and, subject to periodical interruption by internal war or foreign invasion, the priest-kings of Accad, Ur, Isin, and Babylon in turn took tribute of the "fertile crescent" between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean.

Our knowledge of Babylonian society is due in great part to the discovery in 1901 of the code of laws compiled by Hammurabi of Babylon for his empire, about 2100 B.C. Like Egypt, Babylonia was an agricultural country under a theocratic government; but in Babylonia the growth of merchant capital had led to a development of money-lending with which tribal custom would have been wholly unable to deal. The Hammurabi code allows interest at twenty to thirty per cent. Socially the population of Babylonian city-states was divided into three sharply defined classes—full-blown citizens or patricians (*amelu*), descendants of the original settlers; plebeians (*muskinu*), probably resident aliens engaged in trade and their descendants; and slaves (*ardu*). The last-named might be prisoners of war, slaves by birth, condemned criminals, or insolvent debtors. The almost completely patriarchal basis of Babylonian society is shown by the fact that a debtor could redeem himself by selling his wife or child into slavery for three years. A relic of mother-right, however, may be found in a law which recognized marriage between a freewoman and a slave, and enacted that their children should be free. The custom mentioned

by Herodotus, which required every Babylonian woman to qualify for marriage by prostitution in the temple of Ishtar, has not been confirmed from the code or the monuments. But the custom was widespread; and Herodotus is an honest witness.

The penalties provided for different offences throw an instructive light on the Babylonian scale of social values. First in importance comes the maintenance of the patriarchal family. Death by impalement awaits a woman who murders her husband for a lover; death by burning, a mother and son guilty of incest; death by drowning, a wife who without provocation refuses cohabitation with her husband. Drowning awaits both partners in adultery, unless the king pardons the man and her husband the woman. Death (the mode unspecified) punishes rape of another man's betrothed. An extravagant wife may be either divorced or enslaved by her husband. A son who strikes his father has his hands cut off; a nurse who foists a supposititious child on her employers has her breasts cut off. A father guilty of incest with his daughter escapes with exile. A son guilty of incest with a stepmother, or otherwise of repeated unfilial conduct, is disinherited. A father who seduces his son's betrothed before her marriage is merely fined.

Next in importance comes the prestige of the priesthood. A priestess who opens or even enters a tavern is burnt. Sorcery is punished by death; for no magic is permissible save that of the official hierarchy. A man who slanders a priestess or a married woman is branded and enslaved; and the priestess need not, like the married woman, first clear herself by ordeal.¹

Next come the rights of property. Looters of a burning house are thrown into the fire; a fraudulent wine-seller is drowned; death is inflicted for theft, receipt of stolen goods, burglary, brigandage, and the aiding or harbouring of runaway slaves. A slave who defies his master loses an ear; a tenant farmer who robs his landlord loses both hands.

Offences against the person are graded according to the class of the victim. Anyone causing bodily injury to a patrician suffers retaliation in kind—an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. A slave who strikes a freeman loses an ear. A freeman who strikes a social superior incurs a public flogging. But assaults on social equals not involving bodily injury, or on plebeians or slaves

¹ The ordeal was by water. The aspersed matron was thrown into the river: if she sank, she was guilty; if she swam, she was vindicated.

even if injury ensues, incur only a fine. Fines are inflicted for miscellaneous offences such as damage to rural property, neglect of irrigation dykes, embezzlement, and unlawful distraint for debt. A corrupt judge suffers a heavy fine and public degradation from office; a false witness suffers the penalty which the accused would have incurred.

The Hammurabi code remained substantially in force in Babylonia during the millennia that elapsed between its compilation and the end of the ancient world. That it should have done so is evidence of that stable, unprogressive character of Asiatic society which we usually sum up in the phrase, "the unchanging East." This does not mean that Orientals are incapable of progress. Until modern times honours were easy in this respect between East and West; and the lead taken by the West since the Renaissance is unlikely to outlast the twentieth century. But progress in social organization is in the long run dependent on technical advance. Hence, once agricultural societies had achieved a form of organization, the city-state, adapted to their productive development, a relative stability was reached, only to end when the expansion of trade led to new productive developments needing new forms of social organization. In ancient Babylonia trade was only finding its feet. The peasant on his farm, the craftsman in his workshop, the priest in his temple, were the basic elements of the social structure.

In Babylonia, as in Egypt, the primary function of the priest was to perform the ritual which in popular belief was necessary for the beneficial operation of the forces of nature. The priest-king was the magician-in-chief of the city-state. Every year the king of Babylon proceeded to the temple of Marduk, the sun-god, the lord and giver of life, and took the hands of the image in order that the power of the god might pass into him. Like the Pharaohs of Egypt, the early Babylonian kings were revered as gods both in their lifetime and after death. These survivals of primitive magic, as we have seen, did not represent the real beliefs of the priesthood. While keeping up the traditional ritual for public consumption, they were building up by observation of the heavens a body of science in which the truths of astronomy and the falsehoods of astrology were as yet inextricably interwoven, but which was to be their one lasting bequest to civilization. Thus in both Babylonia and Egypt the social cleavage between ruling class and people was reflected in a growing contradiction

between the opinions of the *literati* and the superstitions of the many.

Mention must be made here of the civilization which arose in Crete soon after those of Egypt and Babylonia, and which spread in time to other centres in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean. The existence of this Minoan culture (so called from the legendary Cretan king Minos) was only established in recent times by the excavations of Sir Arthur Evans. The archaeological evidence proves that Minoan civilization was in continuous contact with Egypt, that its cultural level was fully comparable to that of Egypt and Babylonia, that its social structure, like theirs, was theocratic, and that its principal deity was a mother-goddess. This points to matrilineal institutions. Unfortunately the Minoan script has up to the present proved undecipherable; and so long as this is the case the ideology of its users must remain a matter of inference and conjecture.

From about 2000 B.C. onward the Aryan-speaking nomads of the Eurasian steppes began to play a part in history. Driven by pressure of population or by climatic changes on the steppes, tribe after tribe broke away and sought its fortunes elsewhere. The domestication of the horse and the use of iron weapons, in which the Aryans seem to have been pioneers, gave them an advantage over the peoples they attacked. Some of these tribes swept southward into Western Asia, invaded the Babylonian Empire, and extended their sway over parts of Asia Minor, Iraq, Syria, and Palestine. These became the Hittites of the Egyptian and Assyrian monuments and of the Old Testament.¹ Some think that the Hyksos who overran Egypt belonged to the same horde; but this is mere conjecture. Other Aryan tribes pushed into Europe and eventually reached the Mediterranean, where between 1800 and 1400 B.C. they smashed the Minoan civilization and took over what was left of its heritage. These included the Ionian, Achaean, and other tribes who later became known as Greeks. A third set of Aryan tribes migrated eastward and found their way through the Khyber Pass to the valley of the Indus, where between 1400 and 1000 B.C. we find them gradually driving out or reducing to bondage the "black-skinned" Dravidian population.

¹ Strictly speaking, "Hittite" was the name, not of the Aryan conquerors, but of a people in Asia Minor whom they conquered and enlisted in their armies. We do not, however, know the name of the conquerors; and as the monuments refer to their power as Hittite, I have adopted the usual nomenclature.

This impact of economically backward tribes upon more civilized societies is a chronic feature of the ancient world, and played an important part in developing those stresses and strains which eventually brought it to an end. It was not so much a struggle for existence in the biological sense as a struggle for the good things of life—the surplus, over and above what is necessary to keep a community in being, which civilization everywhere produces and barbarism everywhere covets. The conquerors did not as a rule exterminate the populations they subdued. They established themselves as an aristocracy, but gradually interbred with the conquered and lost their racial identity.¹ The stresses and strains set up by conquest are not racial, but social. The nomad conqueror brings with him the traditions of the desert or the steppe—predatory, warlike, and with relatively little use for magic or priestcraft. The peasants among whom the nomad finds himself, on the other hand, are hard-working, slow to violence and steeped to the eyes in superstition. The two belong to different social groups and have different ethics. Their juxtaposition accelerates the process of moral disintegration which the passage from savage to civilized society began.

Of the ancient civilizations overrun by nomads Egypt made the quickest recovery. About 1580 B.C. Ahmosi of Thebes, founder of the eighteenth dynasty, expelled the Hyksos and carried his arms into Palestine and Syria. Succeeding kings of this dynasty pushed their empire to the Euphrates, established contact with Babylonia, and filled Egypt with plunder, tribute, and slaves. Internally they centralized the administration in the hands of themselves and their officials, curbed the power of the nobility, and tried to protect the peasantry from oppression. The Pharaohs of the eighteenth dynasty, in fact, were pioneers of the policy, familiar to-day, of solving social problems by the conquest and exploitation of foreign countries. But their method defeated itself. Their Asiatic empire cost Egypt repeated and exhausting wars, and finally went to pieces under the attacks of the Hittites and the Habiri (nomads of the desert, often identified with the Hebrews).

We have seen that one of the weaknesses of ancient civilization was the widening gulf between the public professions and the secret beliefs of the ruling class. Of all ancient cults sun-worship

¹ Hence the folly of talking about an Aryan or Semitic race. The terms are linguistic, not racial; and the nations who speak these languages may be, and in most cases are, racial hybrids to the last degree.

was the least open to this reproach. Unlike the personifications of the animal and vegetable kingdoms who usually did duty as deities, the sun could be worshipped consistently with the degree of scientific knowledge attained by the Egyptian priesthood. From an early date, indeed, priests tended to rationalize their local bull, ram, hawk, falcon, or crocodile god by investing him with solar attributes. This process was encouraged by the Pharaohs, to whom religious unity was useful as an instrument of government. Under the Theban kings of the eighteenth dynasty Amen-Re, the old ram-god of Thebes now turned sun-god, was honoured as "king of the gods," and the priests of Thebes were loaded with wealth and spoil.

Jealousy of the growing power of the Theban priesthood and a desire to complete the centralizing policy of his dynasty no doubt played a part in inducing Akhenaten (1375-1358 B.C.) to suppress the worship of Amen-Re, confiscate the revenue of his priests, and replace the traditional cults of Egypt by that of Aten, the sun-god worshipped as such without animal attributes. Akhenaten's policy was also an attempt to bring the public religion of Egypt into line with the private monotheism of the *literati*. There must have been a considerable movement behind him or he would have been assassinated at once. As it was, in spite of his iconoclasm and his unpopular policy of withdrawal from Syria and Palestine, he reigned seventeen years and died in peace. But he failed to win the masses; and in fact there is no evidence that the cult of Aten had any social or ethical content that could have won them. Within a few years of the death of Akhenaten the old religion was re-established and re-endowed, his monuments defaced, and his memory execrated. He has been called "the first individual in history." He is at least the first individual recorded to have taken any stand against the crude heritage of superstition that encumbered ancient civilization. That he did so intolerantly and unsuccessfully no more discredits him as a pioneer than does his ignorance of the Copernican astronomy or of the spots on the solar disc.

Egypt went back to the old ways. Under the nineteenth dynasty (thirteenth century B.C.) showy campaigns were fought in Palestine and Syria, but they were fought with mercenary armies and led to no solid results. Thenceforward Egypt rapidly declined. The priesthoods amassed wealth, the people were over-taxed and oppressed, the land was harried by enemies without and usurpers within, and the torch of progress passed to other hands.

CHAPTER V

PALESTINE, INDIA, AND CHINA

THE centuries from 1200 to 900 B.C. were a slow interlude in ancient history, during which the tough, fighting priest-kings of Assur, in northern Iraq, gradually wrested power from the nomadic conquerors of Western Asia and laid the foundation of the Assyrian Empire. Between exhausted Egypt and not yet dominant Assyria lay a no-man's-land in which a number of small kingdoms, Phoenician, Hebrew, Philistine, or Aramaean, fought savagely and inconclusively for land and loot. Then in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. Assyria pushed westward and snuffed them out one by one. Each year the Assyrian armies, an irresistible fighting machine, marched out to waste and slay and rake in more plunder and more tribute, until the whole "fertile crescent" became a prison of nations, and the king of Assur took the hands of Marduk in Babylon as the successor of Sargon and Hammurabi.

The Old Testament, though edited and expurgated by Jewish scribes of a later day, gives the most vivid picture we have of this time of trouble. We see the petty kingdoms warring, massacring, enslaving, and making a little hell for one another in the name of their respective gods (Jahveh, Chemosh, Dagon, Rimmon—it matters not), until the king of Assyria comes down on them in the name of *his* god (Assur), takes their cities, exacts tribute, carries their people captive, and generally makes a bigger hell for them all. Just as the oppression of the Pyramid Age in Egypt led to social conflict and to the cry for a ruler who would restore "righteousness," so now the long-drawn misery of Western Asia led to movements of protest and revolt such as that voiced by the Hebrew prophets.

There is no reason to think that such movements were peculiar to Palestine. Prophets (Hebrew *nebiim*, "announcers," not necessarily foretellers of the future) are an order of men well known in the East from early times to the present day, and derive, like priests and kings, from the primitive magician or medicine-man. But whereas priests and kings form the ruling class of early civilization, prophets first come to the fore as a kind of

unofficial priesthood championing the exploited and oppressed against the exactions of the official brand. Though prophets were not peculiar to Palestine, its social and political conditions favoured their multiplication. There, as elsewhere in the "fertile crescent," pastoral tribes had invaded the settled country and taken what they could for themselves. In course of time the nomads had intermarried with the agricultural population and adopted their way of life, including their religion with its Baals and Astartes, fertility rites and human sacrifices. To the Palestinian peasant Jahveh was just one more Baal. Some nomad clans, however, finding the good lands already occupied, had not settled down, but, like the Kenites and Rechabites of the Old Testament, led a sort of gipsy existence on the margin of civilization, cherishing their desert tradition and providing a rallying-point for movements of revolt among the victims of priestly and kingly oppression. Strong governments such as that of Assyria made it their business to mop up these unsettled elements and prevent them from becoming a danger. But the little Palestinian kingdoms, as we see from the tales of Elijah and Elisha in Kings, were ill equipped for dealing with the dervish and his nomad allies. Before Assyria was in any position to police Palestine the "sons of the prophets" had developed an organization, a political influence, and the beginnings of a literature. Under the Assyrian Empire, and the new Babylonian Empire which succeeded it after 612 B.C., this organization was maintained, though its propaganda had now to be underground and its literature largely anonymous.

All prophets as a matter of course claimed divine inspiration for their oracles. In the then state of human culture the supernatural pretensions of official priesthoods could be met only by pretensions equally formidable. In claiming to speak in the name of Jahveh, the ancestral god of Israel, the prophets were not merely accrediting their own utterances, but enlisting the traditions of nomad life on the side of their social protest. Against kings who grabbed their subjects' wives or vineyards and built themselves palaces of cedar and ivory with forced labour; against priests with their animal and human sacrifices and temple prostitution; against usurers who "sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes,"¹ they appealed to the desert tradition, personified in a god who despised sacrifices, temple services,

¹ Amos ii, 6.

and the other splendours and abominations of civilized life. But by allying Jahveh with the victims of class oppression they gradually altered his character. He ceased to be the god of a few nomad tribes and became the god of the oppressed as such. The social group to which the prophets addressed themselves, though still labelled "Israel," began to include any, regardless of origin, who accepted Jahveh and the code of right and wrong of which he was the symbol. It was not the religion of the prophets which moulded their social programme, but the exigencies of the social struggle which moulded their religion.¹

Thus in Western Asia, under the Assyrian Empire and its successors, there came about that "revaluation of values" which took shape as Judaism. In another part of Asia, under different conditions, a different revaluation was proceeding. The Aryan invaders of India had pushed eastwards from the Indus to the Ganges, establishing themselves, like nomad conquerors elsewhere, as an aristocracy among the native Dravidians. Here for the first time the white race came up against the problem which in many parts of the world still bedevils social relations—the problem of colour. At first there was no colour bar between Aryan and Dravidian. The oldest Sanskrit literature, the Vedic hymns (dating from the period of the Aryan conquest), do not mention it. The races interbred, and the conquerors adopted the settled habits and many of the religious practices and beliefs of the conquered. The power of the Brahmans, for example, exceeds anything found in nomad societies and must have arisen after the settlement in India. The admixture of Dravidian blood, however, led to a progressive darkening of the Aryan complexion and caused the conquerors to take fright. The Brahmans, or magician-priests, availed themselves of the opportunity to magnify their office by the institution of caste, or in modern parlance a colour bar.² The dark-skinned Sudras (as the subject race were called) were barred from all social intercourse with Aryans and forbidden to engage in any but mechanical and menial occupations, or even to worship the Aryan gods. The Aryans themselves were divided into three castes—the Vaisyas, or ordinary freemen, a good deal tinged with Sudra blood, being confined to agriculture and trade; the Kshattriyas, or nobles,

¹ For fuller treatment see the author's *The Bible and its Background*.

² The Sanskrit word for caste is *varna*, "colour." Our word "caste" is from the Portuguese *casta*, "lineage."

not quite so tainted, forming the warrior caste; while the Brahmins, on the strength of a real or supposed racial purity, headed the social scale.¹

Hindu accounts of the origin of Brahmanism and caste are wholly legendary; and we have no reliable history by which to check them. Probably the process occupied centuries. Our knowledge of ancient Hindu society is derived largely from a book of laws compiled by the Brahmins and ascribed (with an audacity unequalled in the Hebrew Scriptures) to the authorship of the first man, Manu. Its real date is disputed; it is thought by Sanskrit scholars to represent pretty faithfully the state of Hindu society from about 600 B.C., but its present form may be many centuries later. It depicts an agricultural and patriarchal society in which trade is carried on, money lent at interest, and justice administered by kings, as in Babylonia under the Hammurabi code. But it outdoes Hammurabi in its emphasis on class domination. The Brahmin is lord of the universe. He may seize whatever property a Sudra acquires beyond a certain amount. He is exempt from taxation and from punishment in person or property. A Brahmin slandering one of a lower caste is fined lightly; one of a lower Aryan caste slandering a Brahmin is fined heavily; a Sudra doing the same is whipped. Inter-marriage between castes is not absolutely forbidden. A man's chief wife must be of his own caste; but he may, if he can afford, take additional wives of lower castes. In such cases the children inherit the caste of their mother. Women, however, may in no case marry men of a caste below their own. A Sudra may not learn the Vedas or sacred books; and no Brahmin may recite a Vedic text where a Sudra may overhear him.

The Brahmins justified to the world these and similar restrictions by means of a grotesque mythology in which we may doubt whether they themselves ever believed. The doctrine of *karma*, according to which each individual's lot in life is the result of his actions in a previous incarnation, may have been sincerely held, but sounds suspiciously like an interested rationalization of social inequality. The weakness which we noted in Egyptian and Babylonian civilization—namely, the absence of a common interest, a common morality, and common beliefs—was magnified beyond measure in India, where not even a pretence of unity

¹ In southern India Dravidian blood predominates, and the Brahmins are as dark-skinned as the lowest castes.

bridged the gulf between rulers and ruled. No advances in the mastery of nature, such as were achieved by the Egyptian and Babylonian priesthoods, can be credited to the Brahmans. Self-condemned to do nothing more useful than carry out a ritual in which they did not believe, the more intelligent found life empty, and, meditating on its emptiness, contracted the disease of metaphysics. Metaphysical speculation is essentially a retreat from life. Only among men dispensed from the need of winning their livelihood by daily work, and divorced from contact with those who do, can such paradoxes as the unreality of matter and of individual lives be even debated. Only among men who have failed to make life tolerable for themselves and others can existence be deemed an evil, self-mortification a virtue, and extinction a release and a reward.

Speculation of this nature, though it may begin with priests, is unlikely to end with them. Laymen, as soon as they have leisure to reflect at all, are likely to go further than priests in their conclusions. So it was in India. Siddhattha Gotama, the founder of Buddhism, was a Kshattriya or noble belonging to a clan settled in the Ganges basin in the sixth century B.C.¹ He was no revolutionary, and did not desire, still less attempt, the overthrow of the Brahmans, whose theory of the inherent evil of life he fully accepted. He accepted, too, the notion common to Indian and other early societies, that some sort of force quits the body at death and may later pass into other bodies, animal or human. Gotama, however, refused to call this force a "soul," and was perhaps as nearly a materialist as the knowledge at his disposal admitted. What he did was to found a religious brotherhood in which pessimistic philosophy was completely disentangled from the traditional rites and myths in which the Brahmans had enveloped it. Buddhism as Gotama taught it was a doctrine for the few. The very name by which he called it, the "noble" or "Aryan path," seems to stress its aristocratic character. The world is evil; and those who join the brotherhood will avoid all action tending to perpetuate or aggravate evil. They will cultivate universal benevolence, kill no living thing, and avoid the pleasures of life, including sexual intercourse. They will do so because they feel with the world's suffering, and not from any superstitious motive such as to save their souls. On this Gotama is emphatic.

¹ Buddha is not a personal name, but an honorific title meaning "enlightened."

There is no soul to save; there is only a flux of desire needing to be taken in hand, treated, and extinguished. The state of *nirvana*—the extinction of desire and of the suffering that attends desire—can be attained in this life by following the “noble path,” and, once attained, ends this particular cycle of births and deaths.

The teaching of Gotama left little room for priestcraft, ritual, or caste distinctions. They are not attacked with the fire of a Hebrew prophet, but dismissed with the shrug of an intellectual aristocrat. “As the four rivers which fall into the Ganges lose their names as soon as they mingle their waters with the holy river, so all who believe in the Buddha cease to be Brahmins, Kshattriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras.” In fact, however, Buddhism changed nothing. It never ousted Brahmanism from any large part of India; and when it became itself eventually a world religion, it was by shedding its asceticism and adopting the apparatus of temples, images, priests, and ritual against which it had begun as a protest. There could hardly be a more ironic contrast than that between the critically alert thinker who founded Buddhism and the hieratic figure, squatting with closed eyes in a contorted posture, who is adored under his name in the Far East to-day.

Far Eastern civilization seems to have evolved independently and, until comparatively late times, in complete isolation from any other. The available archaeological evidence suggests that northern China, at any rate, has been inhabited by substantially the same race of men from the Old Stone Age to the present day. Before 1700 B.C. the inhabitants of the Hwang-ho basin had domesticated animals, taken to agriculture, and begun to make textiles and pottery and to work copper. Tin and iron were in use soon after. The earliest specimens of Chinese writing date from about 1400–1200 B.C. and consist of oracular questions and answers inscribed on pieces of bone and tortoise-shell. We know from them that the Chinese of that day hunted, fished, and farmed; that they already cultivated the silkworm; and that, like other agricultural peoples, they practised a religion based on the belief that dead ancestors passed into vegetation and could be relied on for a good crop if they were approached with the proper rites. Ancestor-worship in China is thus similar in origin to Osiris-worship in Egypt. The emperor was a priest-king, like the Egyptian Pharaohs, styled “the Son of Heaven”

and offering sacrifice and prayer for the whole people in conformity with the prescribed ritual. At this early period Chinese society seems to have retained certain traces of mother-right. The imperial succession was not from father to son, but from brother to brother, so long as any brothers survived; and the same may have applied to inheritance in general. Some of the ancestors worshipped were female: we read of a rain-goddess called "grandmother Yi."

The area of China at that date included only the northern half of what is now China proper. The nearest external civilization, that of India, was separated from it by a thousand miles of table-land and the highest mountains in the world. Consequently until the second century B.C. the Chinese were ignorant of the existence of any settled country but their own. The only foreigners with whom they were acquainted were the nomad tribes on their northern and western borders, known to Chinese historians as Hun-yu or Hsiung-nu, and to the Western world, many centuries later, as Huns. These "foreign devils" were separated from China by no natural barrier, and from prehistoric times repeatedly invaded the fertile and populous basin of the Hwang-ho. China, however, had a way of absorbing her invaders. Both conquerors and conquered being of the same Mongolian race, their relations were not, as in India, complicated by a difference of colour.

About 1122 B.C. invaders from the west, profiting by the unpopularity of the reigning emperor, overran China and founded the Chou dynasty, which lasted nearly nine hundred years. Adherents of the new dynasty were granted fiefs of land and became a feudal nobility, to whom the peasantry had to render labour service. This period seems to have seen also the final victory of father-right in China. The Chou dynasty are said to have enacted that inheritance, including succession to the throne, should be from father to son. Probably they merely gave legal sanction to a system which was already gaining ground for other reasons. Certainly China has been from that day to this one of the most patriarchal countries in the world.

The feudal empire, as is the way of such, tended to disintegrate, and by the seventh century B.C. had fallen apart into a number of warring states over which the "Son of Heaven" retained only a nominal suzerainty. In the sixth century the evils of the time forced on the Chinese mind, as on the Indian, a "revaluation of

values " which found expression in the teachings of rival sages. The first of these was Lao-tzu, a librarian in the imperial household, who founded the system known as Taoism. His history is mixed with legend; and the authenticity of his one book, and even his historical existence, are disputed by some. The word *tao* means "way," and in particular the natural way of things as opposed to the artificial and conventional. Lao-tzu saw the root of all evil in civilization and preached a return to nature. "A government conducted by sages would free the hearts of the people from inordinate desires, fill their bellies, keep their ambitions feeble, and strengthen their bones." One should "account the great as small and the small as great, and recompense injury with kindness." The ideal community is a simple and self-contained peasant village free from all forms of feudal bondage and governmental interference. "Though neighbouring states adjoin one another so that the crowing of cocks and the barking of dogs can be heard across the frontiers, the people on either side of the boundary should never meet each other as long as they live." In his revulsion from the amenities of civilization Lao-tzu is akin to the Hebrew prophets and to his contemporary, Gotama. But he was neither an active politician, like the prophets nor a systematic thinker like Gotama; nor did he, like them, openly challenge popular superstition. He is said, at the end of his career, to have thrown up office and migrated westwards, perhaps to seek among the nomads that simplicity of life which he could not find in China.

The second philosopher was Kung Fu-tzu (Kung the Master), whose name has been Latinized in the West as Confucius. Legend has made free with the name of Kung, as with that of Lao-tzu; but no one, so far as I know, denies his historical status. He was born, in 551 B.C., of a noble but impoverished family, and entered the service of the local feudal lord, but threw up his employment to become a teacher. His attitude to life was the reverse of Lao-tzu's. While Lao-tzu denounced civilization and exalted primitive simplicity, Kung drew his ideals from the feudal society in which he lived, and sought to restore the virtues which he believed it to have once possessed and to have lost. He formulated the "golden rule": "What you do not like done to yourself, do not to others"; but he criticized adversely Lao-tzu's notion of returning good for evil. He had little or no belief in popular superstitions. His comment on ancestor-worship is well

known: "While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve their spirits; and while you do not know life, how can you know about death?" But he practised ancestor-worship all the same. He was an aristocrat and conservative to the core and believed profoundly in old ways because they were old. He claimed to be "a transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients." He idealized the feudal lord or gentleman and had nothing but contempt for the "little man." "The mind of the gentleman is occupied with virtuous thoughts, and that of the little man with gain."¹ Unfortunately the feudal lords were not as occupied with virtuous thoughts as on Kung's theory they should have been. At the age of fifty-one Kung became minister to the local potentate. He resigned after four years on finding that his master preferred the pleasures of the harem to the call of duty. Kung then spent fourteen years searching for a ruler who would accept him as counsellor. He did not find one, and died heart-broken at the age of seventy-three.

The "period of warring states" dragged on until 221 B.C., when Shih Hwang Ti, ruler of the western state of Chin, made himself master of the whole country. This emperor, like the Pharaohs of the eighteenth dynasty in Egypt, set out to abolish feudalism and centralize power in the hands of himself and his officials. As part of this policy he proscribed the teaching of Kung, the philosopher of the feudal class, persecuted his followers, and ordered the seizure and destruction of his works and of all Chinese classics except books relating to medicine, divination, and agriculture. Otherwise he was an able ruler: he extended his empire almost to the limits of what is now China proper, constructed roads and canals, and built the Great Wall to keep out the nomads. So memorable were his achievements that the name of his original domain, Chin, became and still remains the name of the entire country. But he went too fast and too far, and his dynasty perished in civil war. Under the Han dynasty, which succeeded in 206 B.C., most of his work was perpetuated. But the ban on the classics was soon lifted; and with masterly opportunism Confucianism and Taoism, the philosophies of the

¹ Tsui Chi, in his *Short History of Chinese Civilization*, makes it clear that the terms *chun tzu* and *hsiao jen*, translated "gentleman" and "little man," were used to denote respectively nobles and men of the lower classes. Many translators render them by "superior man" and "small man," thereby reducing this and similar aphorisms to little more than platitudes.

fine gentleman and the peasant respectively, were each promoted to the dignity of a State religion. Under the same dynasty China embarked on a career of conquest and expansion which brought her into commercial and cultural contact with civilizations of whose very existence she had hitherto been ignorant, and whose influence opened a new chapter in her history.

CHAPTER VI

GREECE

WE now return to that Western group of Aryan-speaking tribes who in the course of the second millennium B.C. swept down on the Mediterranean and shattered the Minoan civilization in Crete and the Aegean area. These tribes brought with them their predatory, nomadic way of life; their patriarchal organization; their father-god, Zeus the cloud-gatherer; and a relative freedom from priestcraft due to a very slight acquaintance with agriculture. They found in the Aegean a settled, agricultural population far more civilized than themselves, with a social organization probably still matrilineal, and a religion in which magic and a mother-goddess cut a great figure. The invaders looted the cities, shared out the land, and settled down as lords of the soil in the sunny south. They could not be bothered to study the Minoan script; and it was not until some centuries later, when trade revived and Phoenician merchants coasted along the Mediterranean, that the Greeks learnt their letters.

The Homeric poems give us a picture of that early age. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as we have them are finished works of art, and probably date from about 800 B.C. But they embody material much older than that. The story of Odysseus and the Cyclops, for example, has been found depicted on a Minoan gem of the sixteenth century B.C. During this period the Greeks were not yet conscious of themselves as a nation. The name "Hellenes," by which they describe themselves in later times and which we translate by the name "Greeks," is used only once in the *Iliad* and denotes the inhabitants of one small district in northern Greece. The people who sacked Troy are not called Hellenes, but Achaeans or Danaans—names mentioned on the Egyptian monuments as those of piratical peoples raiding Egypt about 1200 B.C., very near to the traditional date of the Trojan War. There is as yet no solidarity among Greeks as against "barbarians," i.e. people of alien speech. The Trojans are not "barbarians," but people of similar language and culture to their foes. Both Achaeans and Trojans, in fact, were branches of the same Aryan horde who had come down from the north and established them-

selves in old Minoan strongholds on both sides of the Aegean a century or two before.

The character of Homeric society is such as we should expect in conquerors who have lately turned from nomads to pirates. The Achæan chiefs show plenty of physical courage and toughness, abundant animal spirits, lavish hospitality, and comradeship in common danger; but they are cruel, treacherous, and mutually disloyal when their interests collide. Their main occupation is war. They go from place to place sacking cities ("city-sacker" is one of the stock epithets for Odysseus), carrying off women and loot, and quarrelling over the division: the plot of the *Iliad* turns on such a quarrel. The position of women is not yet so abject as it became in later Greece; but male domination is already well established: the fidelity of Penelope in the *Odyssey* contrasts sharply with the amours of her husband with Circe and Calypso, which the poet takes as a matter of course. The gods of Homer reflect the manners of his men.¹ Zeus holds court on Olympus like an Achæan chief in his castle, keeping in what order he can an unruly crew of subordinates each with an axe to grind. Two important deities of later times are conspicuously absent from Olympus. Demeter and Dionysus, the Isis and Osiris of the Aegean, are almost wholly ignored. They were deities of the conquered peasantry, beneath the notice of minstrels who sang in great houses.

About 1100-1000 B.C. the Achæan conquerors were overwhelmed by another confederacy of Aryan tribes, the Dorians. These invaders seem to have been more savage and destructive than any that preceded: at any rate, archaeological evidence shows that what was left of Minoan civilization came to an abrupt end at the traditional period of the Dorian invasion. By 700 B.C., at the dawn of Greek history strictly so called, we find Dorian aristocracies established at Sparta and in Crete, holding down the older populations in abject serfdom. Elsewhere in Greece we find city-states of mixed racial origin—Corinth, Sicyon, Aegina, etc., partly Dorian; Athens, Miletus, Mitylene, etc., with no Dorian element. These also are ruled by aristocracies, but are already combining piracy with legitimate

¹ I use the name "Homer" without prejudice to the question of the single or multiple authorship of the poems. The best authorities hold that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* cannot be by the same hand, and that each is to some extent interpolated.

commerce, ousting the Phoenicians from the trade of the Mediterranean and dotting the coasts with daughter-cities from Sicily to the Black Sea. All these people spoke Greek dialects and called themselves Hellenes: the name seems to have come south with the Dorians. All had a common religious centre at Delphi, whose god Apollo may also have come south with the Dorians.¹ That the priests of Delphi never attained a position in the Greek world comparable to that of the Egyptian, Babylonian, or Brahman priesthoods in their respective countries is due to geographical and social reasons. The Greeks lived, not in a rich alluvial plain, but in a rocky peninsula cut up by interlacing mountain ranges, and in the adjacent islands, which did not conduce to political or religious unification; and the Greek ruling class consisted of northerners who, though proud enough of their divine descent, never took priestcraft very seriously.

Ancient Greek history is dominated by the struggle between the feudalism which prevailed in Thessaly, Crete, and above all at Sparta, and the merchant communities represented by the Greek cities of Asia Minor and by Athens. The rivalry between Sparta and Athens was not so much a feud between city-states as a struggle between different levels of civilization. To understand Sparta we must imagine a few thousand Red Indians possessed of up-to-date weapons swooping down on a settled agricultural district and holding down the inhabitants by force. The Spartans had the virtues of savages. They never took to city life: Sparta was not a walled town, but a cluster of open villages. Every free Spartan was a fighter first and foremost. Boys were initiated into manhood with rites of savage cruelty. Thenceforth they lived on a permanent war footing and were forbidden to engage in trade or manufacture, subsisting entirely on the chase and on dues paid in kind by their serfs or "helots." In this way Sparta attained military proficiency (as any community can that cares for that and nothing else) and was able to maintain the lordship of Laconia and the hegemony of Peloponnese. Barbarism, as we know to our cost, is sure of respect and even admiration if it is militarily powerful. Accordingly Sparta, during the greater part of her history, was flattered and appeased by the Greek world, especially by the feudal and slave-owning classes. But to what we usually mean by Greek civilization—

¹ That Apollo was a late-comer at Delphi is well established. See Harrison, *Themis*, second edition, pp. 385-396.

that is, Greek art, Greek thought, and Greek literature—Sparta contributed nothing.

Greek civilization in that sense began in the trading cities of the Asiatic seaboard and the adjacent islands. Those cities had been founded, before Greek history began, by Ionian and Aeolian tribes driven from European Greece by the Dorian irruption. Living on the edge of Asia, just where the trade routes from Babylonia ran down to the Aegean, they grew rich by acting as middlemen between that ancient civilization and the still barbaric West. The invention of coined money, first struck by Gyges of Lydia in the seventh century B.C. and soon adopted by the Greeks, testifies to the rapid growth of Aegean commerce at that time. The needs of trade led in turn to the development of gold and silver mining in the Aegean area, notably in Thrace and Attica. Trade was further stimulated when Psammetichus of Egypt, in return for aid rendered by Ionian mercenaries in ridding that country of the Assyrians, opened the Egyptian market to the Greeks (660 B.C.). For the first time in history a merchant class free from priestly control travelled from country to country doing business, comparing notes, and drawing conclusions.

The first results of the growth of trade were social and political. Men who had made money and seen the world did not take kindly to the rule of landed aristocrats, and often put themselves at the head of the little men and set up popular dictatorships or "tyrannies."¹ The big landowners would then be killed or driven out and their estates given to the peasants, while the tyrant promoted trade, constructed roads and public works, and otherwise furthered the interests that had put him in power.

The second result was religious. The fertility cults of Demeter and Dionysus had been despised and rejected by the Achaeans and Dorian conquerors, and play no part in Homer. But with the growth of trade and industry these peasant cults took on a new character. Transport, quarrying, and mining brought together a population of mixed origin, partly slave, partly free, divorced from the land and unattached to any established social group. The Orphic brotherhoods which arose in Thrace and spread through Greece along the trade routes during the sixth

¹ The Greek word *tyrannos* simply means an absolute ruler, and does not necessarily connote oppression. Tyrants were naturally odious to the aristocracies whom they ousted, and acquired a worse name after the Persian conquest of Ionia, when they were installed to govern in the interest of the conquerors.

century B.C. adapted the myth and ritual of Dionysus to the needs of this uprooted population by promising redemption from the body and union with the god after death to all who followed their rule of asceticism. The parallel between Orphism in Greece and the contemporary teaching of Gotama in India is obvious. Orphism, however, has not the metaphysical subtlety of Buddhism and is racy of the superstitious soil in which it grew. Under the tyrants such cults became respectable. Periander of Corinth, Cleisthenes of Sicyon, and Pisistratus of Athens established and endowed the worship of Dionysus, the god of the common people, as part of their revolutionary policy. From the popular celebrations of the death and resurrection of Dionysus the arts of tragedy and comedy arose. Pisistratus also seems to have taken over the local cult of Demeter at Eleusis and thrown it open to all persons of Greek speech, including slaves.

The third result of the growth of trade was intellectual. Merchants like Thales of Miletus (early sixth century B.C.) became acquainted with Egyptian and Babylonian discoveries in geometry and astronomy and introduced them to the Greek world. Unlike Egyptian and Babylonian priests, these Greek intellectuals saw no reason for subordinating scientific truth to traditional mythology, especially as the mythologies with which they were acquainted (those of Greece, Egypt, and Babylonia) flatly contradicted one another. They therefore scrapped them all and explained phenomena not by gods of whom no one knew anything, but by material substances familiar to all—according to Thales, water; according to Anaximander, his disciple, an unformed matter from which all things come and to which all return. These fathers of scientific materialism were also men of practical ability. Thales urged the Ionian cities to unite under a federal government, but without result. Anaximander designed the first map of the world. Another Ionian philosopher, extraordinary in the wide range of his interests, was Pythagoras of Samos. The son of a poor gem-engraver, he visited Egypt and became proficient in mathematics and astronomy, to both of which he made original contributions, the most remarkable being his theory of the spherical shape of the earth and its motion in space.¹ He also founded the theory of music and was acquainted with medicine. But, unlike Thales

¹ His earth revolved not round the sun, but round an imaginary "central fire." But that he should have allowed it to move at all is sufficiently noteworthy.

and Anaximander, he was no materialist. In Pythagoras the science of the intellectuals and the mysticism of the disinherited met and mingled. He had imbibed (perhaps as a boy in his father's workshop) the Orphic doctrines of reincarnation and redemption by asceticism which were spreading among the unprivileged classes in Greece, and he tried to combine these doctrines with the new learning. He seems, however, to have fallen between two stools. About 530 B.C. he migrated from Samos to the Achaean colony of Croton in southern Italy, and formed his followers into a religious brotherhood which was also a political party. The Pythagoreans succeeded in capturing the government in that and other cities; but their puritan tyranny antagonized both the nobility and the people, and in the fifth century B.C. they were violently suppressed.

Ionian prosperity ended when the Persians in the second half of the sixth century swept down from the highlands of Iran and made themselves masters of Western Asia and Egypt. The new Aryan conquerors were only just emerging from barbarism and were no friends of the Greek trader. Herodotus records the lordly contempt of king Cyrus for men who met in a market "to cheat each other and forswear themselves."¹ With the conquest of Ionia by Persia the economic, political, and cultural leadership of Greece passed to the European cities, and especially to Athens, already a flourishing commercial State under the progressive rule of Pisistratus and his son Hippias. In 510 B.C. the exiled landowners, with the aid of Sparta, ejected Hippias. But they could not eject the commercial interests which had been behind him. In 508 one wealthy aristocrat, Cleisthenes, "dished" the others by appealing to the people, enfranchising hundreds of aliens and slaves, and putting through a new constitution based on the equality of all freemen before the law and the filling of all but the highest offices by lot. The new democracy had not lasted a generation when it had to undergo ordeal by battle in the Persian invasions of European Greece. Its victory at Marathon in 490, and its leading part in the victory of Salamis in 480, ushered in the great age of Athens, which was also the great age of Greece.

¹ Herodotus, i, 153, translated by Rawlinson. The remark of Cyrus is addressed to a Spartan, and therefore inappropriate, as the Spartans were not traders. No doubt, however, it was a common taunt hurled by Persians at Greeks.

Athenian democracy was a new departure in the history of city-states. Hitherto a city had been essentially a union of a few tribes for mutual defence and trade. Only members of those tribes were citizens: if outsiders settled in the town to trade, they and their descendants were excluded from citizenship. Still more were slaves excluded. But now, by the constitution of Cleisthenes, not only were hundreds of aliens and slaves enfranchised, but the old tribal basis of the State was obliterated. The four Attic tribes which had existed from primitive times were ignored, and administrative divisions cutting clean across them were substituted.¹ Henceforward rights and duties depended, not on a man's membership of a particular clan or tribe, but on his status as a free Athenian.

The expansion of trade, the triumph of democracy, and the military victories over Persia led to an extraordinary intellectual awakening at Athens and in those sections of Greek society which felt their interests to be bound up with Athens. Greeks became conscious of themselves as not only different, but superior to the surrounding "barbarians" and as having achieved a way of life unknown anywhere else in the world. We meet this pride of achievement first in the tragedies of Aeschylus, an Athenian of noble birth who had fought at Marathon and Salamis. He is said to have been a Pythagorean; and his thought shows a typically Pythagorean compromise between popular religion and rationalism. In the *Persians*, produced in 472, he celebrates the victory of Athens over the theocratic despotism of the East. In the Oresteian trilogy (*Agamemnon*, *Libation-Bearers*, and *Eumenides*), produced in 458, he goes deeper and celebrates the victory of Athens over the primitive world of tribal custom and blood feud from which Greek civilization itself had sprung. For Aeschylus is not only a patriot, but an evolutionist—the first extant author to express the idea of progress through struggle from a lower to a higher social life. In the Promethean trilogy (of which only one part, *Prometheus Bound*, survives) even the gods are subject to evolution. In the beginning Zeus is the enemy of the human race and impales Prometheus on a rock for helping them. But the crucified Titan defies Zeus; and in the lost sequel

¹ To preserve continuity the word "tribe" (*phyle*) was still used. But the new "tribe" was a mere group of parishes artificially combined for military and electoral purposes, and about as tribal as a modern Parliamentary constituency.

Zeus, in the course of ages, learns mercy and is reconciled to Prometheus and to man. So gods, like men, progress and become civilized. A short step would have led Aeschylus to the conclusion that gods are a reflection in myth of man's inability to control nature, and that to civilize God completely is to explain him away.¹

In reality the Athenians of Aeschylus' day were not so different as they thought from the despised "barbarians." Slavery was not abolished: on the contrary, after the Persian War, when Greek fleets and armies under Athenian command invaded Asia Minor, Cyprus, and Egypt, slaves became plentiful and cheap, until by 431 B.C. they formed over one-third of the population of Attica. The freemen whom they displaced from agriculture, industry, and commerce used their votes to exact maintenance from the State. To find the money for this, Athens embarked on a policy of imperialism and became, in the eyes of all Greece and of her own statesmen, a "tyrant city." The result was the long and bitter Peloponnesian War, in which the trade rivals of Athens, aided by Spartan arms, Persian gold, and domestic treason, finally, in 404 B.C., laid her democracy in the dust. For the first, but not the last, time it was proved that a commonwealth could not endure permanently half slave and half free.

Nor was slavery the only blot on the escutcheon of Athens. The status of women in early Greece, though inferior to men's, had possessed a certain dignity. Homer's heroines—Helen, Andromache, Penelope—are far from nonentities. In historic times the women of Sparta, the most primitive of Greek States, owned property and enjoyed remarkable freedom and influence. But at Athens, and in those cities which developed on similar lines, woman was a mere domestic drudge, an appendage to the property of her husband. Pericles, the great exponent of Athenian imperialism, in his funeral oration over the dead in the Peloponnesian War, admonishes women "to give as little occasion of rumour amongst men, whether of good or evil, as they can."² By an odd paradox the only women at Athens who were able to acquire any education worth the name were successful prostitutes (*hetairai*) of alien birth, of whom Aspasia, the mistress of Pericles,

¹ For fuller treatment see Thomson's *Aeschylus and Athens*.

² Thucydides, ii, 45. Thucydides does not profess to give a verbatim report, but to adhere as closely as possible to the general sense of the speaker. He probably heard this speech.

was a brilliant example. Men who found their wives dull (as they might well be with their disparity of education) resorted either to such women or to homosexuality, the excessive vogue of which in Greek society was nature's revenge for the destruction of the normal comradeship of the sexes.

Nor did democracy mitigate the conflict of interest between the landed and moneyed classes, enriched by slave labour, and the mass of poor freemen who owned few or no slaves and were in danger of losing through slave competition such employment as they had. On the contrary, democracy under such conditions demoralized politics by causing the ruling class to bid for popular support by bogus policies and promises. One result was that the attention of philosophy shifted from the investigation of nature to the investigation of human society. The traders and travellers of Ionia had been interested in such questions as the shape of the earth and the motion of the heavenly bodies. The perplexed citizens of Athens were interested in such questions as the meaning of good and evil, justice and injustice, and the other glib phrases which abounded in political speeches. Professional teachers, or "sophists," who offered to guide the novice over the pitfalls of controversy, drew crowds of pupils. These teachers, grossly caricatured by Plato and later writers, were the pioneers of social science, and raised questions (e.g., "Can virtue be taught?" or as we should put it, "Are moral qualities the product of nature or nurture?") which are the subject of keen controversy to this day. The greatest of the "sophists," Protagoras of Abdera, in his doctrine that "man is the measure of all things," stated a position which has only begun to be seen in true perspective within the last hundred years.

The downfall of the Greek city-state was due, not to the "sophists," but to the attempt to rear freedom on a basis of slavery. The pride of achievement which we find in Aeschylus gives place in later tragedians to dark fatalism or fierce revolt. Sophocles, who lived through the great age of Athens and commanded her forces in the field, devotes two dramas to the study of Oedipus (the man who, willing good, works only evil to himself and others) and affirms the futility of life. Euripides, unlike Aeschylus and Sophocles a man of humble birth, in play after play "debunks" the heroic legends and exposes the seamy side of Greek society—slavery, subjection of women, imperialist wars, and religious imposture. In the work of Euripides we have

travelled far from Homer and Aeschylus and are more than half-way to Shakespeare and Shaw. That is why he is still the most playable of the Greek tragedians.

Among the admirers of Euripides was Socrates. Like Euripides, he was of humble birth: his father was a sculptor and his mother a midwife. He himself began by following his father's trade, and served as an infantryman in the Peloponnesian War. In early life he studied Ionian philosophy, and may at one time have set up as a teacher of science at Athens.¹ Later, however, he dropped Ionian materialism and devoted himself entirely to ethics. Rejecting the view of the "sophists" that morality was relative to human needs and interests, he assumed that the methods of mathematics could be used with equal success in ethics—that qualities like justice, for example, could be defined in a way as self-evident to everybody as a number or a line, and conclusions equally evident deduced from those definitions. We know to-day that numbers and lines are abstractions by which we cope more or less successfully with a complex material world; and we are beginning to see that notions like justice are abstractions by which we cope, so far less successfully, with a complex social world. But to Socrates, numbers, lines, and moral qualities were as objective as tables and chairs—perhaps more so. This failure to distinguish between abstract and concrete started philosophy chasing a will-o'-the-wisp which is still pursued industriously in our ancient universities.

Socrates' life was greater than his philosophy. His fearless opposition to the Athenian popular assembly when it illegally passed sentence of death on eight generals at once, and his equally fearless defiance of the "quislings" installed at Athens by Sparta after her victory, made him enemies in both political camps. In 399 B.C., under the restored democracy, he was accused of infidelity to the State religion. The charge was true. Socrates no more believed in the fables of Homer and Hesiod than Euripides did. His defence as reported by Plato, who was present, is an immortal piece of literature and a fine plea for free enquiry, but prevaricates on the main issue. Even so, he was nearly acquitted, and could have escaped lightly by a little ordinary tact. His deliberate contempt of court ensured his condemnation; and he

¹ Otherwise the satire in the *Clouds* of Aristophanes, where Socrates runs a school of geometry and astronomy, is pointless. Socrates denied the fact at his trial; but the denial may refer to his later life only.

drank hemlock—a martyr for freethought, but hardly an example to freethinkers.

A philosophy founded on nothing more solid than the quest for definitions inevitably split into opposing sects. Of the personal disciples of Socrates, Aristippus of Cyrene equated good with pleasure and reduced morality to the art of attaining it and avoiding pain. Antisthenes of Athens equated good with self-sufficiency, and tried to achieve it by voluntary poverty and renunciation of the refinements of life. This cult of uncouthness earned his followers the name of Cynics (Greek *kynes*, “dogs”). Both Cyrenaics and Cynics gave up politics as hopeless. Diogenes, the pupil of Antisthenes, declared himself a citizen of the world. But this cosmopolitanism was entirely negative. It meant the repudiation of the city-state, not as yet the proclamation of any wider loyalty.

The most famous, however, of the disciples of Socrates was Plato. A blue-blooded Athenian aristocrat, he inherited a contempt for democracy which the execution of Socrates deepened into hatred. When Plato wishes to indicate the sort of philosopher of whom he disapproves, he compares him to “a bald little tinker.”¹ Adopting from Socrates the view that moral principles are objective realities discernible by pure reason, Plato comes to see in this ideal world the only reality, and in the material world about us its unreal shadow. He is thus the founder in the West of philosophic idealism, as Thales and Anaximander had been of philosophic materialism. Peasants, artisans, traders, politicians, and pseudo-philosophers like the Ionian scientists are occupied with the shadow-show. The true philosopher is concerned with eternal values—beauty, truth, and goodness. All will never be well “until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who follow either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside.”² In that ideal State—a kind of glorified Sparta—a ruling class of sages, guarded by a standing army of trained fighters, will be maintained in dignified leisure by the workers, who are to be kept quiet by a “noble lie” to the effect that God made them of baser metal than their masters. Justice, according to Plato, consists in the control of the individual life by reason

¹ Plato, *Republic*, vi, 495, translated by Jowett.

² *Ibid.*, v, 473.

and in the control of the State by the only reasonable class, the philosopher-kings.

Plato's idealism reminds us of that of the Indian Brahmins, and, like it, is a symptom of political bankruptcy. Only an arm-chair philosopher could compare the material world to a shadow-show. Had Plato pressed his analogy home, he would have seen that shadows can be manipulated only by contact with the objects which cast them, and that the fact that man can manipulate the material world proves him to be in effective contact with reality. Plato's quest for the philosopher-king reminds us of Kung's quest for the virtuous ruler in China a century before. Like Kung, he found that no such person existed, and that in practice "the interest of the stronger" (as the "sophist" Thrasymachus put it) dictated the form of the State. In the end Plato has to fall back on the Orphic myth of a future life in which tyrants suffer eternal torment, while more commonplace souls are reincarnated in animal or human form until they learn wisdom through philosophy and receive their reward. As Plato grew older he became more and more a theologian and a bigot. He is said to have wished to commit the writings of the materialist Democritus to the flames. In his last work, the *Laws*, this disciple of Socrates advocates the death penalty for atheism and impiety.

When Plato died, in 347 B.C., Greek politics had reached stalemate. Democracy had proved strong enough to prevent a reactionary power, such as Sparta, from holding Greece down, but unable to cope with the increasing social misery resulting from the growth of slavery. People refused to rear children under such conditions: abortion and infanticide were rife, and population declined. Men who for economic or political reasons had no future in their own cities sold themselves as mercenaries to the highest bidder—often to Persia or one or other of the warlords who troubled the peace of the decrepit Persian Empire. They came back rich, and told their countrymen of the wealth and weakness of the East. To them it was plain that what the Greeks needed was a man who would lead them to the loot of Asia and so end the danger of social revolution. In such a situation Philip of Macedon was able to make himself master of Greece without effective opposition. He had a powerful party on his side in every Greek city, and a belated rally of the democracies was crushed in 338 at Chaeronea. In a few years Philip's son, Alexander, transformed the face of the ancient world by

conquering Western Asia and Egypt and carrying Greek arms to the banks of the Indus.

Among the gainers by the Macedonian conquest was a former pupil of Plato, named Aristotle, the son of a court physician in Macedonia and for some years tutor to Alexander. On Alexander's accession Aristotle moved to Athens and set up as a lecturer on philosophy. Bringing to his task an interest in politics and ethics fully equal to that of Socrates or Plato, and an interest in science which Socrates had lost and Plato had never had, Aristotle proved the greatest philosopher Greece had produced since the decline of Ionian materialism. He applied to human society the same methods of observation and classification which he applied to nature, and never made the mistake of supposing that the material world was unreal or that knowledge was possible without studying it. His ethics are essentially utilitarian: he equates good with happiness. But in working out this principle he uncritically accepts the assumptions of the slave-owning class to which he belongs. He cannot conceive that happiness attaches to life in itself, or to productive activities which maintain it as such. Happiness attaches only to the life of reason; and, in order that he may live that life, man must be provided with external goods and have leisure. Hence the necessity of slavery. Aristotle formulates the convenient theory that some people are "slaves by nature . . . as much inferior to others as the body is to the soul."¹ Such people are endowed with just enough reason to obey orders, but no more, and may justly be used as "animated instruments" by those with a fuller share of it. An artisan is to a certain extent a slave; therefore democracy which gives votes to artisans is bad. Ideally, according to Aristotle, only landowners should participate in government, and the land should be cultivated by slaves imported from abroad and therefore less likely to revolt. Aristotle admits that his theory does not always work: slaves sometimes have the souls of freemen; and in any case it is "very troublesome to keep upon proper terms with them; for if you are remiss in your discipline they grow insolent, and think themselves upon an equality with their masters; and if they are hardly used they are continually plotting against you and hate you. It is evident, then, that those who employ slaves have not as yet hit upon the right way of managing them."²

¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, i, 5, translated by Ellis.

² *Ibid.*, ii, 9.

The Greek experiment in freedom had faltered and failed. The Greek cities were now mere municipalities in the Macedonian Empire. The next great philosopher, Epicurus, left politics severely alone and addressed himself to the task of making life tolerable to the individual in a world which was out of joint and which he did not feel that he was born to set right. He was of poor parentage; and, in the little society which he founded at Athens, men and women, bond and free, met on equal terms. His only interest in philosophy was practical. He took over from Democritus his doctrine of materialism, and so did away with Plato's and Aristotle's exaltation of reason over sensation. He took over from the Cyrenaics their equation of good with pleasure; but by pleasure Epicurus meant freedom from pain of body or mind. Bodily pain is to be avoided by prudence and self-control; mental pain is to be avoided by the conquest of superstition through science, and above all by the elimination of the fear of death. The soul, like the body, is material and mortal. "Death, therefore, is nothing to us, seeing that when we are, death is not come, and when death is come, we are not."¹ The teaching of Epicurus took Greece by storm even in his lifetime. For centuries after his death his school lived on, the greatest freethought movement of the ancient world. Few who joined it were ever known to leave it.

The other great movement of Greece's decline was Stoicism. A Phoenician merchant of Cyprus, named Zeno, came to Athens late in the fourth century B.C., and, retiring from business, embraced the Cynic gospel of self-sufficiency. He gradually elaborated this into a more broadly based philosophy of his own, which came to be known as Stoicism from the fact that he lectured in a colonnade (*stoa*) adjoining the market-place at Athens. The cosmopolitanism professed by the Cynics became with Zeno a positive doctrine of human brotherhood. Throwing to the winds all distinctions of Greek and barbarian, bond and free, he advocated an international society in which men and women would live according to nature without marriage, money, law-courts, or temples. There was no way of realizing such a programme under the successors of Alexander; and in practice the Stoics relegated it to the status of a pious opinion. They continued, however, to be the humanitarian reformers of the ancient world. Like the Epicureans, they found their theoretical basis in material-

¹ Letter of Epicurus in Diogenes Laertius, x, 125, translated by Hicks.

ism; but, unlike them, they compromised with the established religion, wrapped their materialism in theistic language, and mixed it with a good deal of astrological superstition. Nevertheless it was under Stoic auspices that the last Greek attempt at radical reform was undertaken. This was the effort of the two Spartan kings Agis IV (245–241 B.C.) and Cleomenes III (235–219 B.C.) to broaden the basis of the Spartan State by redistributing the land and progressively enfranchising the serfs. It failed: Agis was strangled by the oligarchs; Cleomenes was driven out of Sparta by a Macedonian army and met a miserable end in Egypt. Soon afterwards the Roman legions were marching through Greece and trampling out the dream of freedom for two thousand years.

CHAPTER VII

ROME

THE early history of Rome is lost in a fog of fable. All that can certainly be said is that during the prehistoric period when Aryan-speaking tribes were penetrating into Europe some of them (the Ligurians, Sabines, etc., of later history) found their way in successive waves into the Italian peninsula. Italy, unlike Greece, does not appear to have possessed any but the most primitive culture prior to the Aryan influx. Between 1200 and 1000 B.C. the settlers in central Italy came into conflict with a more civilized people, the non-Aryan Etruscans or Tuscans, who invaded Italy from the eastern Mediterranean, made themselves masters of the fertile country west of the Apennines, and founded the first Italian civilization worth the name. When Rome first emerges from the mist of legend into the light of semi-history, about 600 B.C., she is ruled by Etruscan priest-kings, and though Aryan in speech, seems to have been reckoned an Etruscan city. Etruscan priestcraft left a permanent imprint on Roman institutions: in particular it was responsible for the human sacrifices which survived in historical times as gladiatorial shows. On the south the Etruscans were flanked by the Greek trading cities of the Campanian coast; and it was from the Greeks of Cumae that the art of writing came to Rome.

At the end of the sixth century B.C. Etruscan power was being challenged by the Greek cities of the south, notably Cumae and Syracuse. Rome profited by the weakening of the Etruscans to win her independence. Thenceforth she figures as one of a number of city-states in the plain of Latium, like herself just freed from Etruscan rule and linked to her by a common Latin speech and a military alliance. Like most city-states, Rome was ruled by an aristocracy (probably Sabine) of privileged clans (*gentes*—whence our words “gentle” and “gentleman”) the heads of which made up the senate or council of elders, the permanent governing body of the city. Outside the ranks of the aristocracy was an unprivileged middle class (*plebs*), sprung originally, perhaps, from a conquered population, but steadily augmented by aliens who settled at Rome to trade. Plebeians were originally

no part of the citizen body; but they were liable to military service; and the possession of arms and their increasing numbers enabled them gradually to extort political rights, to be elected to office, and to enter the senate. By the end of the fourth century B.C. all patrician privileges had disappeared, and wealth had displaced birth as an avenue to power.

Still lower than the plebeians were the slaves, whose number, though as yet comparatively small, increased with every successful war. A man's slaves (*famuli*) and other property together made up his *familia*, from which we get our word "family"; and between a Roman father's rights over his family, in our sense of the word, and over his slaves there was not much to choose. Over slaves and children alike he had the power of life and death. Neither slaves nor children could own property of any kind: all they acquired belonged legally to the master or father, though in practice this was not rigidly enforced. A Roman might sell his son, equally with his slave, into bondage to another man.

In the course of the fourth century B.C. Rome converted her alliance with the Latin cities into an enforced hegemony and embarked on an imperialist policy which was to win her first supremacy in Italy and then the empire of the Mediterranean. The conquest of Italy brought her into close touch with Greek civilization. The Greeks of Italy and Sicily regarded Rome much as their kinsmen in the Greek homeland had regarded Macedon—as a useful protection against the danger of social revolution, to which the growing number of slaves and impoverished freemen increasingly exposed them, and against "barbarian" attack. Hence Rome seldom had any difficulty in winning over the Greek cities. The wealthier classes were her regular supporters; and trouble arose only when, as at Tarentum in 281, the democrats got out of hand, or when, as for a few years during Hannibal's invasion of Italy, Rome seemed to be losing a war. The rapid advance of Rome was largely due to her espousal of the rôle of protector of property and order. Wherever Rome went she abolished democracy and installed the propertied classes in power. She saw in the Greek city-states a civilization akin to, but more developed than, her own, and, provided they subserved her policy, was quite ready to take lessons from them in the art of living.

And so in the second century B.C., while the legions added Spain, Macedonia, and Greece proper to the Empire and wiped Carthage

off the map, Greek philosophers drew large audiences at Rome. The more educated Romans were especially attracted by Stoicism. This is usually explained by a supposed affinity between the Roman character and the Stoic ideal. Such an explanation can impose only on those who mistake words for facts. At the time of which I am writing, Roman conquests were flooding the market with slaves, 150,000 being sold after the single Macedonian campaign of 168. The chief slave market of the Empire was on the island of Delos, where as many as ten thousand were sold in a single day. The legionaries who fought these wars thereby laid up a rod in pickle for themselves. They came home to find their small farms ruined by the competition of great estates in Italy and Sicily, where slaves worked in chains by day, were herded in underground prisons by night, and were kept in order by the fear of flogging or crucifixion—the hideous form of capital punishment which victorious Rome adopted from conquered Carthage. The elder Cato, an ignorant brute whom classical authors hold up as an example of Roman virtue, recommended that old or sick slaves should be sold to save their keep. In Sicily a formidable slave revolt lasted some years, and a Roman army commanded by a consul was needed to suppress it. The men who turned the entire Mediterranean world into a field for their own exploitation and extortion can have had no sympathy with the humanitarian and international ideals of the Stoics.

What attracted Roman intellectuals to Stoicism was its justification of the public support of a State religion by men who privately denied it. The historian Polybius, himself a Stoic, commends the Romans for their encouragement of superstition, which holds the masses in check “by fears of the unseen and other shams of the same sort. It was not for nothing, but with deliberate design that the men of old introduced to the masses notions about the gods and concepts of the after-life. The folly and heedlessness are ours, who seek to dispel such illusions.”¹ Panactius of Rhodes, the chief Stoic philosopher of the time, and like Polybius a friend of leading Roman statesmen, argued on similar lines. Thus Stoicism, which had begun with a programme of Utopian internationalism, became an ideological prop of the Roman plutocracy. Some Stoics were true to the social and political principles of their founder: Blossius of Cumae, for example, was tutor to Tiberius Gracchus and an ardent supporter, in 133, of his plan to save the

¹ Polybius, vi, 56.

small farmer by breaking up the great estates. But Gracchus was murdered by the senators; and the Roman upper class, including his brother-in-law Scipio Aemilianus, the pupil of Polybius and friend of Panaetius, solidly approved the murder of one who had tampered with private property in land.¹

The death of the Stoic-trained Gracchus at the hands of a ruling class alarmed for its estates, and the approval of his murder by the Stoic-trained Scipio, set the fashion in Roman politics for a hundred years. Those years were a period of stark class struggle and recurrent revolutionary crisis. The basic cause of tension was the displacement of peasant production by slave production, first in Italy and Sicily, and later in Greece and other provinces. It has been estimated that the Roman world at this time contained three times as many slaves as free inhabitants. To this was added the disaffection of the Italian allies of Rome at their exclusion from citizenship, and of the provincials generally at their systematic plunder by Roman governors and by the contractors to whom the taxes were farmed out. The murder of Tiberius Gracchus was followed, in 123-121, by the attempt of his brother Gaius to break the power of the senate politically, and by his outlawry and death. In 90-89 B.C. the Italian allies, a hundred thousand strong, rose against Rome and forced her to grant the equal citizenship they demanded. From 88 to 81 Rome and Italy were ravaged by civil wars, massacres, and counter-massacres which ended in the dictatorship of Sulla and which, if they settled nothing else, made it clear that the soldiers held the balance of power. From 73 to 71 the slaves took a hand in the struggle. A Thracian gladiator named Spartacus escaped with seventy others, was joined by runaway slaves and impoverished peasants to the number of seventy thousand, and for two years held the Roman armies at bay. Finally Crassus and Pompey, two former officers of Sulla, suppressed the revolt and lined the roads of Italy with crucified rebels. In 66 Pompey was sent to the East, and by 63 had led his legions to the Euphrates and the Caspian and added Syria and Palestine to the Empire. During his absence from Italy the dispossessed found a leader in the impoverished patrician Catiline, who fell, in 62, fighting at the head of a half-armed force of peasants, slaves, and discharged soldiers. In 61 Pompey returned from the East, master of the situation. At first he, Crassus, and Caesar, backed

¹ On hearing of the murder, Scipio is said to have quoted a line from the *Odyssey*: "So perish all who do the like again."

by the legions, overrode the senate and ruled the Empire. Then Crassus met with disaster; and Caesar, after spending seven years (58-51) in conquering Gaul and two (49-48) in disposing of Pompey, ruled alone. He completed the enfranchisement of Italy, relieved distress by founding oversea colonies, tried to promote the employment of free labour on the land, lightened the burdens of the provincials, and reformed the calendar. His murder, in 44, was avenged within two years by the proscription of over two thousand of the Roman plutocracy and the final extinction of the senatorial regime.

A salient feature of this period is the contradiction between the judgment of contemporary moralists and the judgment of history. We need have no illusions about the Roman emperors; we need not even be monarchists to see that the extinction of the bogus "republic" and the broadening of the basis of citizenship by Caesar and his successors were changes for the better, and, so far as they went, a clear gain to mankind. Yet, if the bulk of ancient authors are to be believed, all the virtues were on the side of the old order and all the vices on the side of the new. There could be no better illustration of the fact that our chief knowledge of ancient civilization is derived from the writings of slave-owners and reflects their point of view. Our main contemporary witness of the fall of the Roman "republic" is Cicero. On his authority, or that of later writers, who got their facts second-hand, it was taken for granted, from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century, that Catiline was a common profligate and cut-throat, Caesar an arch-liberticide, and the younger Cato and Brutus disinterested patriots. To-day it is recognized that Cicero's speeches are those of an advocate, not always truthful, not always mutually consistent, and never to be accepted as sole evidence of any fact which their author had reason to falsify. Cicero was invariably the spokesman of property, and with his prosperous origin, rich wife, town house, and three country houses, had every reason to be so. When we turn from his speeches to his letters we see a vain little man pluming himself on his leadership of the well-to-do, coolly asking a contemporary historian to embroider facts to his credit, abjectly running to heel at the crack of Caesar's whip, and going hysterical with delight at his assassination. In his philosophical works he professes to hear all sides and to be guided by probability; yet he disdains to read the Epicureans on the ostensible ground of their lack of literary style. We only know from one

curt reference in a letter that he had in fact read and appreciated Lucretius.

Lucretius, a junior contemporary of Cicero, in his poem *On the Nature of Things*, expounds the Epicurean philosophy. Though unfinished, it is one of the greatest poems, and by common consent the greatest didactic poem in all literature. In theory Lucretius adds nothing to Epicurus; but he brings to his task a crusading zeal all his own. That a Roman patrician (as he seems to have been) should have put such passion into the advocacy of materialism was so incomprehensible to later generations that they could account for it only by supposing him mad.¹ In the modern world materialism has come into its own as a revolutionary doctrine, and we have no need of the hypothesis of insanity to explain Lucretius. When we remember that Polybius, a century before, had commended Rome for her adroit use of superstition as a political engine, the indignation of Lucretius is intelligible. His white-hot invective against priestcraft, used by the unbelieving Roman ruling class to impress the masses, anticipates and resembles that of Voltaire, Paine, Shelley, and many another, against the established religion of modern Europe.

The Epicurean philosophy made crowds of converts, but was under one fatal handicap. In an unfree society only a minority could act upon it. Lucretius might with rolling eloquence recommend the avoidance of pain by simple living and prove death to be nothing fearful and the 'life of fools' to be the only real hell. Of what use was his advice to slaves, who had to live simply anyhow, and whose worst fear was not just death, but such a death as being thrown to feed the lampreys in their master's fishpond or being nailed to a cross and left to the crows? Epicureanism threw the individual on his own resources and ignored the social and economic problem. For the free and secure it was a good philosophy; but for the slave and the downtrodden it had no message.

The Mediterranean underworld thus became a fruitful field for the propagation of religious cults which promised any sort of solution to the difficulties of the majority. The worships of Cybele and Isis found their way to Rome in the course of the last two centuries B.C. and catered in their different ways for the mass of

¹ The silly story ran that Lucretius had been driven mad by a love-philtre and had composed his poem in the intervals of insanity. The poem itself is the best answer.

slaves and freedmen who now formed the greater part of the urban population. Down to the end of the republic Roman citizens were forbidden to take part in the worship of Cybele; and repeated attempts were made to suppress that of Isis. Finally, however, both cults received full toleration. Pompey's conquest of the East had also brought the Jews into the Roman Empire. Since Persian times the Jews had been established round Jerusalem as a theocratic community with a hereditary priesthood, a temple, and a sacred literature in which anonymous scribes had tried to reconcile priestly vested interests with prophetic visions of social justice. Under the successors of Alexander thousands of Jews, either prisoners of war or free settlers, had found their way to Alexandria, Cyprus, and other parts of the Greek world, where their children spoke Greek as their mother-tongue, acquired Greek ways of thought, and used a Greek version of the Scriptures. After Pompey's triumph a Jewish population of slaves and freedmen soon sprang up at Rome. This Jewish "dispersion," as it was called, served everywhere as a focus of proselytism and disaffection. Rome tried to govern the Jews as she governed other subject peoples, by favouring the richer classes and guaranteeing their privileges, and to some extent she succeeded. To the poorer Jews, however, nurtured on the law and the prophets, the Roman Empire, like the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Greek Empires before it, was a monster, a Beast, suffered for a season to slay and oppress the saints of the Most High, but one day to be overthrown and make way for the kingdom of God on earth. Many of the dispossessed were attracted to Judaism by these revolutionary doctrines, propagated not only by word of mouth, but by such writings as the Sibylline Oracles with their versified vaticinations of doom. Others, not revolutionaries, were attracted by the Jewish "wisdom" literature and by such writers as Philo of Alexandria, who equated the Stoic *logos*, the impersonal "reason" or law manifested in nature and in human society, with Plato's "idea of the good" and with the "word" by which God is said in Genesis to have created all things. Thus Jewish monotheism was given a Greek philosophical dress, and the evolution of Jahveh from a tribal god into a cosmopolitan deity, identified with the interests of the downtrodden everywhere, was advanced a further stage.

Meanwhile the Roman revolution had thrown up a saviour of society in Augustus, who restored order at home, rounded off the

Empire in the East by annexing Egypt, and fixed its European frontiers on the Rhine and Danube. Under him and his successors the Empire gradually ceased to be Roman except in name. True, the first five emperors were Romans of the Julian and Claudian clans, and preserved the forms of the Roman republic. But they were advised by men who a century before would not even have been Roman citizens—the Tuscans, Maecenas and Sejanus; the Greek freedmen, Pallas and Narcissus; the Spaniard, Seneca; the Gaul, Burrus; the Sicilian, Tigellinus. Their armies were still recruited mainly in Italy, but hardly at all from Rome. Their court poets, like Virgil and Horace, were Italians; their historians, like Livy, Italians too. Though these writers called themselves Romans and counted the past glories of Rome their own, they were members, in fact, of that class of well-to-do Italians who had succeeded to the heritage of the Roman plutocracy and become the main beneficiaries of the revolution.¹

In dealing with the morals of the Roman Empire it is necessary to avoid extreme judgments. By making suitable use, on the one hand, of contemporary historians and satirists it is possible to depict the Empire as an infernal cesspool of cruelty and corruption from which the world had to be saved by Christianity. By concentrating, on the other hand, on Roman law, Roman roads, Roman baths, Roman aqueducts, and the amiable sentiments of philosophic writers from Seneca to Marcus Aurelius, it is possible to depict this period as a high peak of civilization and enlightenment from which humanity tragically declined into “barbarism and religion.”² The fact is that no period of history is ever quite so good or quite so bad as dealers in rhetoric like to pretend. Rome had entered into the heritage of a Greece already decadent. Her Empire, from its start, was a slave society and could not escape the characteristics of such a society. Moreover it was a slave society on an unprecedented scale. Never before in so large an area had three-fourths of the population become the mere chattels of the remaining fourth. The Italian conquerors enjoyed their good fortune greedily and vulgarly like *nouveaux riches*. They learnt Greek vices without Greek refinement, and Greek philosophy without its intellectual discipline. We know the

¹ Virgil and Horace had lost their property in the upheaval, but more than recouped their losses by imperial patronage.

² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, lxxi. Gibbon's view of the Empire is much more balanced than his epigram might suggest.

result—the banquets interlarded with emetics to enable the guzzlers to go on, the inhuman gladiatorial shows in every province of the Empire, the bogus Stoicism which made a saint of the bigoted Cato and a hero of the extortionate and cruel Brutus. It does not follow that the whole population of the Empire or even a majority had become dead to decency. In any society a majority must in the nature of things be engaged in useful work, or life could not continue. The discipline of daily labour is as a rule a guarantee against immoderate orgies. And although in the Roman Empire such work was chiefly done by slaves, or by freedmen scarcely less despised than slaves, even that had its compensations. The subjection of millions of men and women of different peoples and languages to one political and economic system broke down old tribal and national barriers and made it impossible for them ever to be restored in their ancient form. The Stoic ideal of human brotherhood had now some relation to reality. That even the Roman populace, living parasitically on imported corn and deliberately corrupted by the spectacles of the arena, was not deaf to humane appeals is shown by one incident. In A.D. 61, the city prefect having been murdered by one of his slaves, the senate, in accordance with Roman custom, ordered the execution of his whole slave establishment, to the number of four hundred. The people turned out with stones and firebrands to effect a rescue, and the streets had to be lined with Nero's soldiers before the execution could be carried out.

There was, in fact, plenty of good will in the Roman Empire, but it was caught in the net of a spent and expiring social order. Enlightened minds knew that the basis of society was wrong, but were impotent to alter it. The career of Seneca illustrates the *impasse* into which ancient civilization had got. Intellectually he was head and shoulders above his contemporaries. The range of his interests was encyclopaedic: he wrote voluminously on natural science, ethics, and theology, and dabbled in the drama. He believed emphatically in the Stoic ideal, declared that his country was the world, denounced the gladiatorial shows, and demanded that slaves should be treated not only with kindness, but with respect. But all this was on paper. His life was that of a careerist and go-getter. He amassed enormous wealth by imperial favour and money-lending; and his financial operations were among the causes which provoked the desperate rising of the Britons under Boadicea. As adviser to Nero he was privy to that

emperor's matricide. His Stoic essays seem to have been a form of escape from a world with which he could not cope. Finally, Nero told him to commit suicide, which he duly did. Complacent to the last, he told his friends that, as he could not leave them anything (his wealth being confiscated), "he bequeathed to them the only, but still the noblest, possession yet remaining to him—the pattern of his life."¹ Evidently the gap between theory and practice did not trouble him at all. The next famous exponent of Stoicism, Epictetus, a freedman who flourished late in the first and early in the second century, reverts in effect to the Cynic gospel of self-sufficiency and abjures all attempts to influence or alter the world about him.

No basic change in Roman society was possible so long as victorious wars continued to supply slave-owners with cheap labour. The conquest of Britain in the first century A.D., the suppression of the Jewish revolt (66–70), and the Dacian campaigns of Trajan (101–106), flooded the market with prisoners and so prolonged the duration of chattel-slavery. Gladiatorial shows were at their acme: Trajan celebrated his Dacian triumph by an exhibition lasting four months, in which ten thousand men and eleven thousand beasts are said to have perished.² But his reign marked the turning-point of Roman imperialism. It ended in such a blood-bath in the East (due to a second Jewish revolt during Trajan's invasion of Parthia) that his successor Hadrian (117–138) was glad to abandon the policy of conquest and devote himself to internal reform.

Hadrian was not a Roman or even an Italian, but, like his predecessor Trajan, a Spaniard who had come to the top by military promotion and, unlike Trajan, a man of ideas. Under him the Stoics had a chance to apply their programme. The cessation of conquests had raised the value of slaves, and Hadrian and his Stoic advisers were able without undue opposition to initiate measures for their protection. Masters were forbidden to put their slaves to death or to sell them for immoral or gladiatorial purposes; and the noisome prisons in which slaves were herded on rural estates were abolished. Other reforms were the free maintenance and education of poor children in Italy (begun under Nerva and

¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, xv, 62, translated by Church and Brodribb.

² Ten thousand gladiators had fought during the whole reign of Augustus. From this fact we may judge the growth of these shows during the century between Augustus and Trajan.

Trajan, but continued on a larger scale by Hadrian), limitation of the despotic rights of the father of a family, the collection of taxes direct instead of through contractors, and the beginning of that codification of Roman law which was to be the Empire's most important gift to later civilization.

But when all was said and done, the Roman Empire remained a slave society. The Stoic reforms were half-hearted and came too late. The evidence of slaves was still taken under torture; and the execution of slaves was still by crucifixion. The predominance of slavery on the great estates of Italy and Sicily led to the ruin of the land by inefficient cultivation and to the exhaustion of the source from which the legions had been recruited. From the time of Hadrian the imperial armies were raised in the provinces in which they were stationed. The slave empire was dying at the heart. Moreover, the men who tried to reform it had little or no conception of the legacy of hatred left by its record. The Stoic lawyers and philosophers had outgrown the prejudices of race, but not of class. They did not move in the poorer quarters of the Mediterranean cities or listen to the talk of the men and women influenced by Jewish apocalyptic literature. It was Hadrian's prohibition of circumcision and his foundation of a Roman colony on the site of Jerusalem which provoked the third and last great Jewish revolt against Rome, convulsed the Empire for three years, cost rivers of blood, flooded the slave markets again, and led to the final dispersal of the Jews from Palestine.

As in dealing with the Roman Empire, so in dealing with the rise of Christianity, it is necessary to avoid two opposite errors. According to the creed officially professed to-day in Western Europe and America the condition of mankind had under the early Roman Empire become so desperate that the Creator of the universe took flesh upon him, lived as a man for thirty years in the province of Judaea, suffered death, rose again, and founded a Church which by divine guidance triumphed over persecution and by whose activities the world since then has been immeasurably improved. I have no space to enter here into the philosophic, scientific, and historical reasons which make this view untenable. Those who entertain it may be recommended to read the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, or if that labour be too great, to look around and ask themselves candidly whether the world in the last

two thousand years has in fact undergone any improvement which cannot be explained by natural causes. Those who reject the Christian view must for their part beware of the pitfall which has entrapped some modern freethinkers who, in their reaction against orthodoxy, see in Christianity throughout its history an unmixed evil, in its votaries mere liars and dupes, and in its persecutions mere figments of the martyrologist. No movement which won and held the allegiance of millions of men and women for so many centuries can be so dismissed. Such crude, black and white historical judgments resemble the opinions of children for whom all characters in history books are either "good" or "bad." They are unscientific, and should give place to a more balanced view.

Under the early Roman Empire, by a process of which we can only conjecture the details, a fusion was taking place in the Mediterranean underworld between the Jewish dream of an anointed king (Messiah) who would turn the tables on the oppressor, and the older and more widespread myth of a god who by conquering death conferred eternal life on his worshippers. By the second century Christian propaganda was making noticeable headway in the Roman Empire. Whatever view we take on the highly controversial subject of Christian origins, one thing is certain. The early Christians did not make converts by preaching a new ethical doctrine. The moral doctrines attributed to Jesus in the so-called Sermon on the Mount were anticipated by the Jewish rabbis. Even the asceticism found in the Gospels was anticipated by the Essenes. Such teaching by itself would not have been remarkable and would certainly not have led to persecution. The early Christians made converts and drew down upon themselves the hostile attention of the authorities by holding out the hope of an early end of the existing order and the advent of the kingdom of God on earth. In this they resembled the Jewish proselytizers who circulated apocalypses and Sibylline Oracles; and the imperial authorities did not at first distinguish between them. The suppression, however, of the three national revolts practically ended Jewish proselytism. People who might have become Jews under Nero became Christians instead under Hadrian. Both Jews and Christians in the mass regarded the Roman Empire as Satanic and looked for its destruction at the hands of God and his Messiah. But the Jews had three times staked their all on armed revolt and lost, and were now at the

nadir of their fortunes. The Christians saw in the Jewish tragedy a divine punishment for the rejection of the true Messiah who had suffered under Pontius Pilate, but who, they said, was alive and would soon return to conquer and to reign.

To the Imperial Government Christianity seemed at best a "perverse and extravagant superstition,"¹ at worst a dangerous and seditious conspiracy. Official policy therefore wavered between contemptuous toleration and savage repression. We need not be surprised that Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic emperor (161-180), persecuted the Christians. As emperor he inherited the reformist policy initiated by Hadrian, and extended it in some directions; for example, he tried to mitigate the horror of the gladiatorial shows. Intellectually he was inferior to Hadrian and below the average of the Stoic school. Not only did he practise the established religion, as all Stoics did and as an emperor could not help doing, but he seems really to have believed in the rites he practised. His *Meditations* reveal a religious, not a scientific mind. He thanks the gods that he "did not spend too much time in reading history, chopping logic, or considering the heavens,"² and says: "A world without either gods or Providence is not worth a man's while to live in."³ But it was not for religious reasons that he persecuted the Christians. His dislike of the tenets of the Epicureans, who were equally dissenters from the established religion, did not prevent him from endowing their school at Athens concurrently with those of the Stoics, Platonists, and Aristotelians. The Epicureans, Marcus no doubt reasoned, were educated men; they had a right to their opinions; and there was no danger of their infecting the masses. With the Christians it was otherwise. As Celsus, a contemporary critic of Christianity, put it, their teachers were mainly weavers and cobblers and their converts ignorant people and slaves. What right had they to an opinion? To Marcus their refusal to conform is "mere obstinacy."⁴ His policy towards them is dictated by political and class antipathy. The persecution of Christianity becomes intelligible if we remember that in the eyes of the ruling class it was a religious revolt of the slaves which at any time, for all they knew, might turn to open revolution.

The more educated Christians tried to present their religion in a

¹ Pliny, *Letters*, x, 96.

² Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, i, 17, translated by Collier.

³ *Ibid.*, ii, 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xi, 3.

different light and to curb those tendencies in the rank and file which might lend colour to the imperial suspicions. This motive is plainly visible in the New Testament.¹ Apologists like Justin (150) and Tertullian (197) are at pains to disclaim any hostility to the Empire. The disclaimer is not always diplomatic: it is difficult not to read a veiled threat in Tertullian's hint of what "a single night and a few little torches" could do if Christians were permitted to avenge wrong with wrong.² In general, however, as the Church grew in numbers and wealth and the episcopate developed from an elective office into a vested interest, the contradiction widened between the millennial hopes of the poorer Christians and the policy of their leaders. To keep their following and prevent a dangerous breakaway, the bishops had to pay lip-service to popular Messianism and reluctantly to allow the circulation of such a work as the Apocalypse of John with its inflammatory prophecies of the destruction of Rome. They themselves hoped not for the destruction of the Empire, but for its conversion.

They had grounds for their hope. Ancient civilization was running down. The imperial armies had ceased to be, except in name and organization, Roman. They fought for pay and plunder or for a popular general, and could be kept loyal only by pampering them at the expense of the civil population. Taxation steadily increased, while the material resources of the Empire steadily diminished. Usurpations and disruptive movements became frequent. Meanwhile in the forests of Central Europe new barbarian confederacies were forming and pressing on the frontiers. In the middle years of the third century the Rhine and Danube defences gave way and the Goths and other Germanic peoples invaded not only the border provinces, but Greece, Asia Minor, and even Italy. The Empire disintegrated under the strain; and, though a series of tough soldier-emperors from Aurelian (270–275) to Diocletian (284–305) managed (largely by the enlistment of barbarian mercenaries) to restore the frontiers, the Roman world was never again under one head for more than a few years together. Faced by barbarian attack without and chronic distress, disaffection, and civil war within, the rulers of the Empire came to the conclusion that a new religion might have its uses. For a time they encouraged Mithraism, a solar cult of Persian

¹ For details see the author's *The Bible and its Background*.

² Tertullian, *Apology*, xxxvii, 3, translated by Glover.

origin, which had many resemblances to Christianity and the further advantage of involving no breach with the established religion of the Empire. But in 312 Constantine, who was engaged in a struggle for power with several rivals, decided to enlist the support of the Christians, and was thereby enabled to dispose of his competitors one by one and to make himself sole ruler. In this way Christianity became the religion of the State.

Anyone who imagines that the establishment of Christianity effected any moral reformation in the Roman world may be recommended to read a history of the Empire in the fourth century. If the later pagan emperors were little better than successful gangsters, the early Christian emperors were just the same. It is often said that Christianity, if it did not end slavery, at least bettered the lot of slaves. But slavery was already dying out from economic causes. The regular importation of human chattels had ceased with the cessation of Roman conquests. The days when rich Italians or provincials could live easily and carelessly on the massed labour of slaves had gone for ever. Large areas of land had gone out of cultivation altogether; and in order that economic life might be carried on at all, production had to be put on a new basis. This was found in serfdom; that is, in the cultivation of the land by peasants bound to the soil and obliged to render services or pay a fixed part of the produce to the landowner. The transition from slavery to serfdom was already far advanced by the time of Constantine, the first emperor to recognize and enforce serfdom by legislation. He continued the gladiatorial shows; and if he abolished for religious reasons the punishment of crucifixion, that reform is somewhat offset by the considerable additions which he and his successors made to the number of capital offences and by their increased resort to execution by burning.

There were Christians to whom the conversion of Christianity into a State religion seemed a rank betrayal of all for which they stood. The Donatist heretics in North Africa, supported by bands of fugitive slaves, peasants, debtors, and other malcontents, raised the cry, "What has the emperor to do with the Church?" and were the first Christian sect to be persecuted by the Catholic authorities. More usually the protest took the negative form of individual withdrawal from society and refusal to assist in any way in the perpetuation of a dead and damned world order. Asceticism had been a feature of one side of Christianity from the

first, and was given a tremendous impetus by the condition of the Roman Empire in its last troubled centuries.

The end was thereby hastened. A government whose subjects, to avoid its service, fled in their thousands to the desert was forced to rely for defence more and more on the barbarians, who from its servants soon became its masters. Under Constantine the palace was crowded with Franks. In 363 the last pagan emperor, Julian, leading an army partly composed of Goths, fell fighting in Persia. In 376 the Goths *en masse* crossed the Danube, and two years later destroyed an imperial army at Adrianople and established themselves permanently within the Empire. Thenceforth the only question was whether this or that half-civilized warrior chief, owning at most a nominal allegiance to a shadow-emperor, should inherit Roman power. The siege and sack of Rome by Alaric and his Goths, in 410, was an outward and visible sign that the ancient world was dead and that the Dark Ages had begun. Jerome, in his monastery at Bethlehem, wept over the captivity of the city which had held the whole world captive. Augustine, in his bishopric at Hippo, labouring to show that paganism, not Christianity, had ruined Rome, set going the myth, which persists to this day, of a depraved society miraculously saved from the abyss by the Christian revelation. But the last pagan poet, Rutilius Namatianus, returning by sea to his home in Gaul six years after the sack of Rome, saw the Mediterranean islands swarming with monks who had lifted no finger for the falling Empire, and drew his own moral.

“ Would that Judaea never had been won
By Pompey’s arms or by Vespasian’s son!
Infection spreads when treated with the knife:
The conquered race treads out its conqueror’s life.” ¹

¹ Rutilius Namatianus, v, 395-398.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

THE break-up of the Roman Empire brings on the scene the last two groups of Aryan-speaking peoples to play a part in history—the Teutons and the Slavs. The overthrow of the Roman Empire in Europe by the Germans bears a certain analogy to the overthrow of the Minoan civilization in the Aegean by the Greeks eighteen centuries before. The catastrophe, however, was not so complete. The Goths on the Danube and the Franks on the Rhine had been in contact with the Empire for centuries before they overran it, and had absorbed a certain amount of its civilization. They were not simply destroyers, and in some cases were welcomed as deliverers. The Anglo-Saxons, on the other hand, who invaded Britain came from a part of Germany remote from Roman influence, and their onset was far more destructive. The fifth and sixth centuries in Britain are marked by an eclipse of civilization more total than anywhere on the Continent of Europe. In the East, where alone, after 476, imperial authority survived, we find in the course of the next century the Slavs, the last of the Aryans to quit their native steppes, overrunning the Balkan peninsula, taking service with the Byzantine armies, and in individual cases rising to the highest rank. The emperor Justinian, the final codifier of Roman law, and his general Belisarius, were both Slavs.

The fall of the Empire in the West had the effect of greatly enhancing the power and position of the Church. Through the donations of the faithful the Papacy had already become possessed of rich estates in Italy and the adjacent provinces. Clovis the Frank (481–511), the first German king to be baptized into the Catholic Church, found in it a useful ally against his rivals in Gaul. Other barbarian monarchs in due course profited by his example. They built churches, founded episcopal sees and monasteries, and endowed them lavishly until the Church became the biggest landowner in Western Europe. The clergy and monks, for their part, were grateful for favours received and viewed indulgently the ruffianly careers which often disgraced their royal patrons. It is doubtful whether there ever reigned such a line of sanctimonious thugs as Clovis and his descendants. We weary of

the tale of treachery and murder, and are nauseated by the cloak of religion used to sanctify mere greed and grab. But Clovis was a Catholic and benefactor of the Church; and the episcopal historian of the time, Gregory of Tours, therefore excuses his crimes. "Every day," he writes of Clovis, "God caused his enemies to fall beneath his hand and enlarged his kingdom, because he walked with a right heart before him and did the things that were pleasing in his sight. . . . King Clovis, who confessed the Trinity, and by its assistance crushed the heretics, extended his dominions through all Gaul."¹ Similarly, after the conversion of England, Caedwalla's Christianization of the Isle of Wight, in 686, by the summary method of massacring its whole pagan population and settling it with Christians, met with no condemnation either from bishop Wilfrid, who abetted the proceedings, or from the Venerable Bede, who tells the story.²

There is in fact no evidence that the peoples of Europe, after their often forced conversion to Christianity, were more kindly, more chaste, more sober, or more peaceful than they had been before. Even in their beliefs there was less change than might be supposed. The acceptance of Christianity did not mean the dismissal of pagan deities as mere figments of the imagination. It meant that, instead of gods to be worshipped, they were now devils to be renounced, that Christ and the saints were stronger than they, and that dealings with the old gods were now punishable by death and by hell-fire after death. Moreover, by the deliberate policy of the Church, popular Catholicism remained (and in Catholic countries remains to this day) essentially polytheistic. Pagan feast-days were replaced by the festivals of martyrs, and pagan idols by the relics of saints, which were credited with such miraculous powers that their fraudulent production became a notable industry of the Middle Ages. No church was considered to be properly consecrated unless it contained the bone of a saint, a piece of his garment, or something of the sort. Most valued of all were pieces of the "true cross." The East was richer in such objects than the West; and Palestine was the happy hunting-ground of pilgrims who hoped to secure relics with a colourable pretence to authenticity. Everywhere in Europe a considerable body of pagan practices lived on through the Middle Ages with the

¹ Gregory of Tours, ii, 40; iii, prologue.

² Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, iv, 16. Caedwalla promised a fourth part of the land and booty to "the Lord" and duly made it over to Wilfrid.

sanction or connivance of the Church; and broken traditions of the proscribed worship itself, though driven underground, persisted in the form of witchcraft.

While popular Catholicism was and is little but a baptized paganism, official Catholicism was and is primarily a big economic vested interest. Medieval bishops in most cases differed little or not at all from secular lords of the soil. Monks soon came to occupy a similar position of parasitic privilege. As their numbers increased, they became organized in communities, and the extreme asceticism of the early pioneers was considerably relaxed. Monasteries and nunneries, endowed with large grants of land and freed from all secular jurisdiction, inevitably shifted the burden of manual labour on to the peasants who cultivated their domains, leaving their inmates free to live a life of devotion combined with ease. The many who for one reason or another were unfitted for a secular career in those unsettled times had every inducement and opportunity to take refuge in monastic vows. There is not a time during the Middle Ages in which we do not read of the laziness, avarice, and profligacy of monks and clergy—and that in histories written, not by their enemies, but by members of their order; for during the greater part of the period no one else could read or write. Such contemporary chronicles of the early Middle Ages as we possess, meagre, partial, and credulous as they are, we owe to the Church; and in reading those chronicles the fact stares us in the face that the clergy attach more importance to the conservation of Church property and the punctual payment of tithes, first-fruits, Peter's pence, and other Church dues, than to any other consideration whatever. In the words of Sismondi, from the seventh century onwards religion consisted in munificence to monasteries.¹

The fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries had seen the Aryan reserve army move into action. In the seventh century it was the turn of the Semites. The desert tribes of Arabia had not changed much since the remote age when their ancestors had overrun the "fertile crescent" and carved out kingdoms in Babylonia, Syria, and Palestine. The empires which had ruled the Middle East for two thousand years had been strong enough to prevent a repetition of those exploits on any noticeable scale. During this period the Arabs remained a nomadic and patriarchal people except on the fringes of

¹ Sismondi, *Histoire des Français*, cited by Lecky, *History of European Morals*, thirteenth impression, vol. ii, p. 216.

the peninsula, where trade with neighbouring countries led to the growth of a merchant class and of those stresses and strains which invariably accompany the transition from barbarism to civilization. In the opening years of the seventh century Mohammed, a trader of the important town of Mecca, attracted a following by denouncing after the fashion of a Hebrew prophet the oligarchy who governed the city and the idolatry in which they had a vested interest, and by preaching the doctrine of the unity of God which he had picked up on his travels from Jewish and Christian sources. The discontented rallied to him. Thrown out of Mecca (622), he answered force with force, raided the caravans, and, with an army recruited by the hope of plunder or paradise, re-entered Mecca as conqueror (630). The Meccan magnates submitted in time to avoid the worst, and were rewarded for the abolition of idolatry by the elevation of their city into the religious centre of all Arabia.

The religion founded by Mohammed was called by him Islam ("submission to God") and its adherents Moslems ("those who submit to God").¹ Its theoretical basis is simple monotheism and the recognition of Mohammed as prophet of God, its main practical basis the equality of all believers and the duty of all to contribute to the support of poorer Moslems. "Give thy kinsman his due," says the Koran, "and the poor and the son of the road; and waste not wastefully, for the wasteful were ever the devil's brothers. . . . And slay not your children for fear of poverty; we will provide for them."² This principle of solidarity, shared by Islam with Judaism and primitive Christianity, accounts for its swift spread in a society which was just beginning to feel the maladjustments of civilization. The rapid success of his propaganda in Arabia led Mohammed to extend it to the world beyond. The Byzantine and Persian Empires were effete, oppressive, and enfeebled by mutual war. Mohammed addressed letters to the Byzantine emperor and the Persian king, inviting them to accept Islam or take the consequences, and, when they ignored the summons, began a holy war against both empires. After his death, in 632, the only way in which his successors could keep the Arab tribes together was to launch them against the infidel. In the space of eighty years Islam spread westwards to Syria, Egypt,

¹ Strictly speaking, the prophet should be called "Muhammad" and his followers "Muslims." But these forms are unfamiliar to British readers, and I have therefore avoided them. "Mahomet" and "Mussulman" are solecisms for which there is nothing to be said.

² Koran, xvii.

North Africa, and Spain, and eastwards to Iraq, Central Asia, and the Indus basin.

The successes of Islam in the Mediterranean area were largely due to the disillusionment of the masses with Christianity. The Church in the Byzantine Empire was simply an instrument of government. The attempt to weld the contradictory elements in early Christianity into a uniform State religion had resulted in the promulgation by General Councils and the enforcement by persecution of a credal orthodoxy far beyond the comprehension, let alone the belief, of common men and women. The Arab conquerors were welcomed as deliverers. They made no attempt at forcible conversion and had no need to make any. Christians or Jews who chose to remain such were free to do so and to retain their property subject to a land tax and a poll-tax. Those, however, who chose to embrace Islam enjoyed at once, regardless of racial origin, the full privileges of Moslems—exemption from taxation (though not from the almsgiving obligatory on every Moslem), a right to a share in the booty taken by Arab armies, and a career open to talent. Small wonder that populations went over *en masse* to a religion which promised to turn them from serfs into freemen and substituted two simple affirmations for the mumbo-jumbo of Nicene orthodoxy.¹

The eastern conquests of Islam are to be similarly explained. Zoroastrianism, the ancient religion of Persia, had become under the Sassanid dynasty an instrument of domination as intolerant and oppressive as official Christianity. The old Semitic lands of the Euphrates and Tigris basin welcomed the Arabs with the same alacrity as the Syrian and African subjects of New Rome. In Persia itself, where Zoroastrianism was indigenous, the Moslem task was less easy. The Persians never whole-heartedly adopted Islam, and hold it to-day in a distinctive and much adulterated form.

The seeds of decay soon appeared in the Islamic Empire. As the number of Moslems increased by the million and the spoils of victory accumulated, the office of caliph (Arabic *khalifa*, "successor" of Mohammed) became in effect an ordinary Asiatic despotism for which rival Meccan magnates intrigued and fought.

¹ The story of the destruction by the Arabs of the famous library of Alexandria rests on the authority of a Christian writer who lived six centuries later. The library had been pillaged by the Christians in the fourth century and no longer existed in the seventh.

Propaganda slackened: it was more profitable to let the unbelievers alone and tax them than to waste time in converting them. The theoretical equality of believers gave way in practice to the taxation of conquered countries for the benefit of the Arabs; and the Arabs were not strong enough to hold down so vast a dominion by their own force. In the eighth century the irresistible solidarity of Islam was a thing of the past. Its armies were checked in India to the east and in Gaul (now beginning to be called France) to the west, its orthodoxy disintegrated into "two and seventy jarring sects," and its Empire into independent and mutually hostile fragments. Its great service to the world was neither its creed nor its ethic, but its preservation of Greek science and philosophy during a period when the barbarous West had forgotten their existence.

India, during the thousand years that had elapsed between the spread of Buddhism and the first Moslem invasion, had been a peculiarly unhappy example of the "unchanging East." Its brief contacts with Greek civilization through the wars of Alexander and his successors were primarily military and diplomatic, and though they influenced Hindu art and science, did not affect the life of the people with its village communities, its Brahman priestcraft, and its caste system. In the third century B.C. Asoka, who reigned over all India except the extreme south, became a convert to Buddhism and tried to make it the religion of the country. His extant inscriptions and the Buddhist chronicles and legends are our sole source of information about him. No Greek writer or Brahman book mentions him at all. If his claims for himself are credited he should rank, as a sovereign, higher than Hadrian and the Antonines. But his work was evanescent. The Buddhism of Gotama, with its renunciation of force, cannot easily be made into a philosophy of government. In the centuries after Asoka's death India was invaded by successive waves of nomads from Central Asia—the Sakas about 140 B.C., the Kushans about A.D. 100, and the White Huns about A.D. 470. Of these the Sakas and Kushans both adopted Buddhism after a fashion; and its patronage by the invaders no doubt helped to promote a reaction against it among native rulers and to invest the reactionary superstitions of Hinduism with a halo of patriotism. The struggle against the British *raj* in modern times has had a similar effect. By the time of the Arab invasions in the seventh and eighth centuries Buddhism as a popular faith had disappeared from India.

If the Moslems, who then appeared on the scene, had appealed to the masses as liberators from priestcraft and apostles of equality in the spirit of Mohammed, they might have rallied the depressed classes to their standard and swept Brahmanism from India as they had swept Christianity and Zoroastrianism from the Middle East. But the holy war had degenerated into a series of pillaging expeditions; the promise of equal rights for all Moslems was not kept; and Islam was halted on the Indus. When eventually, in the eleventh century, Moslems overran Northern India under Mahmud of Ghazni, it was a military conquest pure and simple, and its sole result was to add one more to the religious pests which plague that unhappy country.

While Buddhism was dying out in India it was taking a new lease of life in the Far East. Under the Han dynasty (206 B.C.—A.D. 220) China extended her sway by conquest as far as Turkestan and opened up trade with India and the West. One result of these conquests was to drive the nomads, who had infested the Chinese frontiers, westward until they impinged on Europe, Persia, and India under the familiar name of “Huns.” Another result was to introduce Buddhism to China. The circumstances of its introduction are legendary and doubtful. Down to the end of the Han dynasty, at any rate, Buddhism was no more than a tolerated religion. In the third century A.D., however, the Han Empire fell to pieces; and in the period of barbarian invasion and chaos which ensued, Buddhism came to the top in China for much the same reasons which brought Christianity to the top in the Roman Empire. Confucianism, the creed of the *literati*, had become discredited by association with oppression and misgovernment. People sought an escape from their difficulties partly in Taoism, partly in Buddhism. But the Taoism and Buddhism which now competed for supremacy in China no more resembled the teaching of Lao-tzu and Gotama than the Christianity established by Constantine resembled the Sermon on the Mount. Taoism had become encrusted with magic and superstition. Buddhism, while still on Indian soil, had compromised with the surrounding Hinduism so far as to deify Gotama as a saviour-god of the stock pattern, to surround him with a whole pantheon of saints and angels, and to worship them with a ritual rivalling that of the Hindu temples. It was this new Buddhism (called *Mahayana*, the “great vehicle,” in contrast to *Hinayana*, the “little vehicle,” the simple teaching of Gotama) which in the early

centuries of the Christian era was carried from India to Central Asia and China, and which entered into competition with Taoism for the allegiance of the Chinese people. The Taoists defended their monopoly by the time-honoured weapon of persecution; but Buddhism proved the stronger opium. In the end Taoism, in order to survive, had to assimilate itself to Buddhism. In China to-day the temples, images, priests, and ceremonial of the one can hardly be distinguished from those of the other. Both in turn reacted on Confucianism and overlaid its ethics with religious conceptions originally alien to it. Through all these vicissitudes, until the impact of Western civilization in our own times, China remained a country of patriarchal peasants under a priest-emperor, alternately conquering and conquered by her nomad neighbours, exploited and squeezed by mandarins, monks, and war-lords, but always absorbing her conquerors, quietly indifferent to misgovernment, and enriching the world with inventions some of which (for example porcelain and printing) were many centuries in finding their way to Europe.

We must now return to the West. The failure of Islam, in the eighth century, to establish itself north of the Pyrenees meant that Europe had to find its own way out of the barbarism consequent on the fall of the Roman Empire. From the eighth to the eleventh century recovery was retarded by the attacks of the Vikings—Scandinavian adventurers, strangers to civilization, who descended in swarm after swarm on the British Isles and the Continent of Europe. By the end of this period the adventurers had staked out claims for themselves and founded kingdoms or principalities strong enough to prevent the inroads of others. These Northmen, or Normans, took over the battered social order and civilization of the countries where they settled, turned from sea-rovers into feudal lords, and struck a mutually profitable bargain with the Catholic Church. The Papacy, enriched by royal benefactions and by contributions levied on the faithful throughout Latin Christendom, was by now the richest and most corrupt corporation in Western Europe. It was said that money could do anything at Rome. But in order to enjoy the advantages of corruption Rome needed the support of the secular arm. It suited her well to have these tough Norman adventurers handy to reconquer Sicily and Malta from Islam, to reduce England to canonical obedience when it threatened to slip away, and to bring Ireland for the first time into real subjection to the Holy See.

It suited the Normans equally well to have their pious filibusterings dignified as holy wars and to help themselves with the papal blessing to kingdoms north, south, east, and west. The process reached its acme in the First Crusade, when a host of Norman and French adventurers, recruited by the Pope's promise of a plenary indulgence and by the hope of carving a principality or a duchy out of Asia, achieved the conquest of Syria and Palestine and the temporary establishment of a Latin kingdom in the Holy Land.

Anyone who thinks these holy wars of Christendom in any way morally superior to the holy wars of Islam which preceded them must have a blind spot in his composition. If there is any difference it is in favour of the Moslems. The Moslem conquerors had been welcomed as liberators by the people of Palestine, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt: when they ceased to be liberators and became exploiters it marked the beginning of the decline of Islam. The Crusaders were welcomed by nobody and were a scourge wherever they went. Yet it is from the Crusades that we must date the beginning of Europe's recovery from barbarism. The opening up of the East revived trade and enriched the merchants first and foremost of the Italian cities, then of France, the Rhineland, and Flanders. The mariner's compass seems to have found its way to Europe at this time. With the growth of commerce went intellectual emancipation, stimulated among the learned by the writings of Aristotle, which in the course of the twelfth century were introduced into Western Europe by Jew merchants and translated from Arabic into Latin. This was accompanied among the unlearned by a revolt against the wealth and corruption of the Church which showed itself in the heretical movements of the Middle Ages.

The earliest of these movements was that of the Paulicians, or Cathari, a persecuted sect who had existed in the Byzantine Empire from the seventh century and may go back to the early days of Christianity, though the continuity of such sects is in the nature of the case difficult to prove.¹ They held the pessimistic doctrine that this world was the creation of Satan and the only real hell, and that man should seek redemption from it by voluntary poverty and celibacy. The established form of Christianity,

¹ The name "Paulicians" was given to the sect by its enemies, who traced it back to Paul of Samosata, heretical Bishop of Antioch in the third century. "Cathari" is a self-bestowed epithet meaning "pure."

with its priests and sacraments, was in their eyes a devilish imposture. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries this heresy spread along the trade routes to the growing urban centres of Western Europe. The view that the Catholic Church, with its feudal privileges, was a creation of the devil found wide acceptance among the traders and artisans of such cities as Milan and Lyons. They might not personally embrace the gospel of poverty and celibacy; but they were willing enough to transfer their support from the Pope and the priests to those who did. There were thus two grades of Cathari, an inner circle of ascetics and a much larger following of "believers," who lived a normal life and usually deferred full initiation till their death-bed. The lay nobility of southern France protected the heretics, who from the town of Albi, one of their strongholds, became known as Albigenses. Other names given to them, such as Tixerands ("weavers") and Patarenes ("ragmen") indicate the class of people who chiefly joined them.¹

To the Church it mattered little whether a heretic was an ascetic or a mere "believer." She lost his money anyhow. Wherever the Cathari had a following, the income of the Church seriously diminished; and that was not to be borne. In 1209 Pope Innocent III organized a crusade against the Albigenses. For twenty years the south of France was given over to fire and sword, and the first stirrings of Europe in her medieval slumber were drowned in blood. Rome, as if haunted by the ghosts of her victims, blackens the memory of the Albigenses to this day.² Our knowledge of them is derived almost wholly from their enemies. Yet we know enough to be able, while rejecting their theology, to see in them the first of the noble army of French anti-clericals—true precursors of the Huguenots of the Reformation, the Jacobins of the Revolution, and the underground fighters against Nazi tyranny in our own day.

The crusade against the Albigenses marks a turning-point in medieval history. Persecution for heresy, though recurrent ever

¹ The Franciscan order was originally an attempt to carry out within the Church a programme of voluntary poverty like that of the Catharist ascetics. The Popes set aside the rule of Francis of Assisi, allowed the order to hold property collectively, and so managed to assimilate it to the other Catholic orders.

² See, for example, Abbot Butler, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, article "Dominic," where their tenets are described as "destructive of civil society itself"—the distinction between the two grades of Cathari being conveniently ignored.

since the fourth century, had hitherto been local and spasmodic. But from the thirteenth century onward the Church became more cruel in defence of her threatened interests. The Inquisition was set up and the newly founded Dominican order, under direct papal control, charged with its administration. Its first victims were the Cathari of France, Italy, and Germany. We are sometimes told that the Holy Office saved suspected heretics from indiscriminate lynching at the hands of the mob.¹ It is therefore worth emphasizing that in Southern France the Inquisition was established in the teeth of repeated popular risings, followed by a savage repression lasting for nearly fifty years, and that in Italy and Aragon risings against the Inquisition and assassinations of inquisitors were not unknown. One result of the operations of the Inquisition was the discovery that numbers of professing Christians still patronized older religions under the form of witchcraft. Hitherto the Church, while condemning witchcraft, had taken no special measures against it. Henceforth it was treated, like heresy, as a menace to the unity and faith of Christendom, and its extravagant pretensions were used to justify a new extension of persecution.

Thirteenth-century Churchmen had no notion that they lived in a changing world. Two great Dominicans, Albert of Cologne and Thomas Aquinas, made it their business to defend Catholicism against the heresy and secret freethought which in spite of the efforts of the Inquisition were rife in the cities of the West. The chief intellectual influence with which they had to reckon was that of Aristotle, whose writings had hitherto been powerful weapons on the side of heterodoxy. So aloof were Albert and Thomas from real life that it did not occur to them to question the scientific accuracy of Aristotle—as they might usefully have done, since he had been over fifteen centuries dead. They accepted his authority as final in the sphere of natural knowledge, and combated it only where it conflicted with Catholic dogma. To meet such cases Thomas formulated the view that reason and revelation are both roads to knowledge, but that revelation is the higher of the two and must take precedence over reason. By reason, be it noted, Thomas did not mean thinking for oneself, but thinking as Aristotle thought; and by revelation he meant in effect the authority of the Church. In this way the

¹ It is regrettable that Shaw lends his name to this piece of Catholic apologia in *Saint Joan*, scene vi.

reactionary philosophy of Aristotle, with its preference of the contemplative to the active life, was harnessed to the purposes of the Catholic Church, while his fundamental rationalism was set aside to make room for belief in the Trinity, the creation of the world out of nothing, the immortality of the soul, the virtue of faith, and the duty of persecuting heretics and witches.

Neither the arguments of the schoolmen nor the fires of the Inquisition could stop the social and political movements which were undermining medieval Catholicism. The later Middle Ages were a time of growing tension between the feudal lords, and especially the Church, on the one hand, and the merchants and craftsmen of the towns—the bourgeoisie in the original sense of that word—on the other. The feudal system failed to provide a political framework adequate to the reviving economic life of Europe. While Innocent's crusaders were exterminating the Albigenses the Mongols under Jenghiz Khan were building up an empire which reached from China in the East to the Russian steppes in the West. Destructive though their onslaughts were, the Mongols were entirely without religious fanaticism, and, so long as their tribute was paid, cared not a jot whether their subjects were Buddhists, Moslems, or Christians. To provide themselves with luxuries they encouraged trade; and one result of their rule was to reopen the caravan routes between China and the West and to pave the way for the Venetian merchants, Nicolo and Maffeo Polo and Maffeo's son, Marco, whose travels to the court of Kublai Khan, the grandson of Jenghiz, first revealed to Europeans the extent and resources of Far Eastern civilization.

Between Marco Polo's departure from Venice in 1271, and his arrival home in 1295, much had happened. The Crusaders had been finally ousted from Syria and Palestine, and Europe was thrown on her own resources. The power of the Papacy had passed its apogee. In 1296, when Pope Boniface VIII tried to forbid the taxation of clerics by secular princes, two masterful monarchs, Philip IV of France and Edward I of England, called his bluff. A century earlier they would have been excommunicated and deposed. But times had changed. The rulers and peoples of Europe were beginning to tire of these overweening pontiffs who called themselves "servants of the servants of God," pretended to supernatural sanctity, and showed themselves in practice as greedy and corrupt as any potentate in Christendom.

Boniface did not take up the challenge. In 1303, after a further quarrel with France, he died a broken and defeated man. A succession of Frenchmen were elected to the Holy See, the seat of the Popes was removed to Avignon, and they became for the best part of a century little more than puppets of the French crown and obedient tools of French diplomacy.

The modern world was now visibly in the making. In Italy, in France, in the Rhineland, in the Netherlands, in the Baltic countries, and in England, the people of the towns, organized in merchant guilds and craft guilds, were freeing themselves from feudal interference and achieving a civic life comparable in some ways to the cities of ancient Greece. But there was one vital difference between the ancient Greek cities and those of medieval Europe. The Greeks, by their victory over Persia, had acquired a plentiful supply of slave labour which eventually killed free industry and paved the way for the gigantic slave empire of Rome. The West was in a very different position. The Crusades had ended in defeat. The young civilization of Europe, jammed between Islam and the ocean, had no supply of slaves at its disposal. Western industry therefore grew up on a basis of wage-labour; and to increase the supply of wage-labour the towns had a direct interest in loosening the bonds of serfdom on the land. Christianity did not forbid slavery; but the slaves simply were not there.

Politically the rising bourgeoisie favoured the growth of strong and stable monarchies as a weapon against the turbulence of the barons and the arrogance of the Church. Kings for their part fostered the towns in every possible way for the sake of their financial and political support. But here the development of the new Europe was uneven. In France and England the alliance between king and bourgeoisie bore fruit in national monarchies, though it took two centuries of struggle for these to grow to their full stature. In Italy and Germany the rivalry between Pope and emperor prevented the emergence of any strong central authority. The writings of Dante Alighieri reflect the bitter longing of a Florentine citizen, fallen on evil days through civil convulsion, for a government that will give peace. In the *Divine Comedy* Dante uses the supernatural background of hell, purgatory, and paradise as a canvas on which to project his loves and hates. He looks back to the Roman Empire as a golden age of settled government. Virgil, the poet of Roman glory, is his

chosen teacher and guide. The temporal power of the Popes is to Dante a sheer calamity.

“ Ah, Constantine¹ of how much ill was mother,
Not thy conversion, but that marriage dower
Which the first wealthy Father took from thee! ”²

The lowest pit of hell is reserved, not for heretics, but for traitors. Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of the first Caesar, are crunched in the jaws of Satan along with Judas Iscariot. But Dante's bitterest scorn is directed at cowards who take no part in the struggle. They are admitted neither to heaven nor to hell, but are left outside in the dark.

“ No fame of them the world permits to be;
Mercy and Justice equally disdain them.
Let us not speak of them, but look, and pass. ”³

We need not suppose that Dante really believed in the underground torture-chambers which he describes with such unpleasant gusto. He had been badly hurt in the rough-and-tumble of Florentine politics and took a morbid pleasure in imagining torments for his enemies. But by calling the work a “ comedy ” he discreetly warns his readers not to take him too literally.³

From one point of view Dante is the greatest poet of the Middle Ages; from another he is a herald of the Renaissance. Within five years of his death the Florentines were manufacturing cannon for use in war. Feudal modes of warfare and feudal modes of thinking were alike doomed. In the middle of the fourteenth century the great plague known as the Black Death swept Europe from south to north and brought economic dislocation with it. On an impoverished society clerical and papal exactions pressed with redoubled weight; and the flood of unbelief smothered by the Inquisition surged up again in a more active and aggressive form. The Great Schism (1378-1417), during which a Pope at Rome was supported by one group of European powers and a Pope at Avignon by another, stripped the Papacy of the last rags of moral prestige. Wycliffe and the Lollards in England, Huss and his followers in Bohemia, denounced the international

¹ Dante, *Inferno*, xix, 115-117, translated by Longfellow. Dante accepts as authentic the supposed “ donation of Constantine ” by which that emperor made over the dominion of the West to the Bishop of Rome. In reality it was a forgery of the eighth century.

² *Ibid.*, iii, 49-51.

³ The epithet “ divine ” is not Dante's, but was added by an admiring editor.

rackets radiating from Rome and Avignon and demanded the confiscation of the swollen wealth of the upper clergy and the monastic orders. Wycliffe died in his bed; but his followers in the next generation were exterminated by fire and faggot. Huss was lured to Constance under a safe conduct and burnt; but all attempts to repeat the Albigensian crusade at the expense of the Czechs met with abject failure.

Meanwhile new Moslem enemies, the Osmanli Turks, were pressing hard on what was left of the Byzantine Empire and threatening to close the trade routes to the East. European merchants had to think of alternative outlets for their enterprise. During the fifteenth century Portuguese seamen sailed south along the coast of Africa in search of gold and slaves and the sea route to India. By 1453, when Constantinople fell to Turkish artillery, the Portuguese had reached Sierra Leone and established the African slave trade. Other merchant adventurers, English or Genoese, remembering that Aristotle and Ptolemy had said that the earth was a sphere, conceived the project of reaching Asia by sailing westwards. In 1492 Columbus, having engaged the support of the Spanish sovereigns, set sail and landed in the New World, believing that he had reached Asia. In 1498 Vasco da Gama, after rounding the Cape of Good Hope, reached India. The modern world was born. Europeans for the next few centuries were to have the globe at their feet. What would they do with it?

CHAPTER IX

THE MODERN WORLD

THE papal answer to the foregoing question was to issue bulls granting all newly discovered lands in the West to Spain and all those in the East to Portugal. The Spaniards used their power as might be expected. They excluded all other nations from trade or settlement in the New World, reduced the West Indian natives to slavery on the sugar plantations or in the mines, and when they died out, imported negroes from Africa to take their place. Their overthrow of the Aztec dominion in Mexico, with its hideous human sacrifices, can hardly be regretted. Over the fate of the more interesting Inca civilization of Peru it is useless to moralize. The best that can be said for the *conquistadores* is that their terrible cruelties sprang not from colour prejudice, but from unsophisticated human greed, and that their exploits made possible a progress to better things. The Portuguese in Asia had a less lurid, but more squalid, record. Unlike the Spaniards, they had to do with native States capable of defending themselves, and their conquests were confined to a line of maritime bases. One effect of Portuguese expansion was to ruin Portugal herself by the wholesale importation of negro slaves into the mother country and the consequent decay of agriculture.

While a relative handful of Europeans were opening the ocean highways and conquering the New World, in Europe itself the Renaissance was passing into the Reformation. These two phases of European history are often treated as antithetical: the artistic and freethinking Renaissance is contrasted with the puritanical and intolerant Reformation. This is a superficial view. Both were products of the same underlying cause—the growth of trade in the later Middle Ages leading to the rise of a rich merchant class, and a lay *intelligentsia* using the printing-press to produce books for the new educated public. In Italy, where commercial capitalism had developed earliest, the literary and artistic side of the Renaissance was most luxuriant. There, in spite of the weakness and disrepute of the papal court, there was little radical hostility to it. The Papacy was after all an Italian institution. A family like the Medici, from mercantile beginnings, could rise

to a position resembling that of the ancient Greek tyrants and could see two of their members elected Pope. Machiavelli, who more than any other writer speaks the mind of the Italian Renaissance, treats religion as a piece of State machinery which may be used to help, but must not be allowed to hinder, the cause of national unity on which his heart is set.

It was far otherwise north of the Alps. Here the smouldering resentment of the educated laity, particularly the urban middle class, at the multifarious clerical exactions to which they were subject was offset by no compensations. Money crossed the Alps southward: none returned northward. The strength of the Church in these countries lay in her enormous wealth, in the traditional association of her festivals and ritual with popular custom, and in her consequent utility as a buttress of secular authority. But a monarch choosing to ally himself with the middle classes against the Church would be able to defy her with impunity.

When, therefore, Luther, in 1517, nailed to the church door at Wittenberg his ninety-five theses against the sale of indulgences, and in 1520 denounced papal Rome as "the greatest thief and robber that has ever appeared on earth, or ever will,"¹ he fired a train that was already laid all over North-Western Europe. Wherever the Reformation raised its head—in Germany, Switzerland, England, Scandinavia, France, or the Netherlands—the Reformers demanded the cessation of payments to Rome, the confiscation of Church land, the dissolution of monasteries, and the abolition of unnecessary holidays which interfered with industry and trade. The attack on Church property inevitably led to an attack on Church doctrine; but the economic offensive preceded the doctrinal. Popular resentment of clerical exploitation long antedated Luther; and Luther himself assailed indulgences three years before he went on to deny the seven sacraments. It was not loss of faith in dogma which led men to resent oppression, but the hard fact of oppression which led to the denial of dogma.

The Reformation was essentially a repudiation of the authority of the Catholic Church in faith and morals. The divergent interests of its adherents led them to very different views as to the kind of authority to be substituted for it. To Henry VIII of England, and the Lutheran princes of Germany and Scandinavia,

¹ Luther, *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*,

the Reformation meant that every secular ruler could determine his subjects' religion and dispose of Church property as he pleased. This suited very well those lay landowners who received grants of abbey land, and those rich merchants who objected to the abbeys as trade competitors and hoped to get a slice of their land cheap or gratis and to set up as gentry. To the middle classes generally, as the Reformation proceeded, it came to mean the rejection of princely as well as papal authority in religion and the election of ministers and other officers of the Church by the laity—the system set up by Calvin at Geneva and by Knox in Scotland. To many petty tradesmen, artisans, and peasants the Reformation meant the overthrow of feudalism and the reform of society from top to bottom on the basis of the social justice implicit in one side of early Christianity, but long overlaid by ecclesiastical accretions. This side of the movement asserted itself in the Peasants' War in South Germany, in the Anabaptist rising at Münster, and to some extent in Ket's rebellion in England. Persecuted alike by Catholic and Lutheran, Anglican and Calvinist, these people (anticipating George Fox) appealed to the "inner light" rather than to the letter of Scripture, advocated community of goods, condemned litigation and oaths, and in many cases at least denied the Trinity and other articles of the orthodox creed. The appeal to the inner light as against Church and Bible marked in fact the beginning of popular freethought. Before very long simple artisans were found who "attenuated all Scriptures into *Allegories*, and made them aery, empty nothing,"¹ or who "questioned whether there were an heaven or an hell, but what is in this life," and "believed that all things come by nature."² The revolt against authority was to know no halting-place short of modern materialism.

To fight the explosive forces released by the Reformation Rome relied on the hideous machine of the Inquisition, the military and economic resources of the Spanish Empire, and the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits, with their quasi-military organization and discipline, became and remain the spearhead of Catholic reaction. They specialized in the conversion of the rich and influential and in the education of the young, and practised a remarkable opportunism, enjoining passive obedience to Catholic sovereigns, while not hesitating to recommend assassination of heretical "tyrants."

¹ Fuller, *Church History of Britain*.

² Strype, *Annals of the Reformation in England*, xxxv (under date 1575).

While the Inquisition enforced religious conformity in Spain and Italy, Spanish arms and Jesuit arts between them restored Catholicism over a large part of Central Europe and built up a vast Catholic empire in the New World to redress the balance of the old.¹

But Rome fought in vain against the momentous strides in the organization of knowledge which followed the opening of the ocean highways. The needs of navigation had directed attention to astronomy and led to the revival by Copernicus of the old Greek hypothesis of the motion of the earth. Giordano Bruno, the first great modern philosopher, took up the Copernican theory with enthusiasm and combined it with the Epicurean doctrine of an infinite universe. Copernicus, says he, is greater than the discoverers of new continents; for they have only disturbed the peace of nations and infected new lands with "the poison of perverse laws and religions," while Copernicus liberates the mind from chimeras and shows it how to ascend to the stars. Bruno is noteworthy for his revival of the idea of progress. We owe no deference, he argues, to the ancients as such; our world is older and more experienced than theirs, and we are likely to know better than they. In his best-known work, the *Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, Bruno attacks allegorically all forms of anthropomorphic religion and expounds a pantheism which anticipates Spinoza and Hegel. Finding Italy too hot to hold him, Bruno travelled in France, England, and Germany, and acclaimed in verse the check administered to Catholic reaction by the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Rashly revisiting Italy, he was arrested by the Inquisition, imprisoned for seven years, and burnt in 1600 at Rome.²

The martyrdom of Bruno was a notice to all and sundry that in Catholic Europe the Renaissance was dead. The great discoverers had dealt a death-blow to the prosperity of the Italian cities by diverting the stream of Oriental traffic to the Atlantic seaboard. Already English and Dutch merchants were reaping the fruits of victory over Spanish sea-power and trading in waters

¹ A singular example of Jesuit opportunism is afforded by the early missionaries to China. They won the confidence of the Chinese by adopting their dress and manners and tolerating ancestor-worship and Confucianism, and their respect by introducing Western science and medicine. They were finally called to order by the Pope. See Tsui Chi, *Short History of Chinese Civilization*, pp. 194-198.

² See two essays on Bruno in Whittaker's *Metaphysics of Evolution*.

where the Iberian monopoly had hitherto been unbroken. This led to the invention, probably in Holland, of the telescope, and to those discoveries by Galileo which confirmed the Copernican theory and ushered in the great age of science. The forced recantation of Galileo was one more proof that the torch of progress had passed to the Protestant north. Bruno, while in England, had made the acquaintance of Sidney, Greville, and other Elizabethan worthies. His influence has been traced in Spenser's *Faery Queene*. Among the courtiers of Elizabeth and their literary protégés there existed a private freedom of opinion which far outran the narrow bounds of Anglican orthodoxy enforced on the common people. The modern world attains self-consciousness in such men as Raleigh, Bacon, Marlowe, and Shakespeare—in the scepticism or "atheism" with which Raleigh was reproached; in the call of Bacon for an experimental science that shall "produce worthy effects, and endow the life of man with infinite commodities";¹ in Marlowe's thirst for forbidden knowledge, which is often a very echo of Bruno; and in Shakespeare's exuberant nationalism and dramatic sympathy with all sorts and conditions of men and women.

But there is a reverse to the medal. The men who at the Reformation overthrew the Catholic Church and took over her wealth and power were, when all was said and done, out to feather their own nests. So far as they had any ideology at all, it was expressed in the formula of the divine right of kings. The nation was a vast landed estate with the sovereign as proprietor and his greatness (depending of course ultimately on the wealth of his subjects) as its principal purpose. International politics was a game of diplomacy and war in which the States of Europe manoeuvred against one another for position and power, and in which Machiavelli, though disavowed, was the instructor behind the scenes.

"Admir'd I am of those that hate me most.
Though some speak openly against my books,
Yet will they read me. . . .
Might first made kings, and laws were then most sure
When, like the Draco's, they were writ in blood."²

The new governing class who came to the top in Tudor England had no intention of encouraging the common man to think for

¹ Bacon, *Letters*, i, 123.

² Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, prologue, spoken by Machiavel.

himself. While they helped themselves to abbey lands, took shares in the slave trade and in the loot of the Spanish Main, and set up profitable new trading monopolies like the East India Company, they sent Anabaptists and Socinians to the stake and Brownists to the gallows. Opinions tolerated in Raleigh, the courtier, were a matter for prosecution in Marlowe, the shoemaker's son; and he might have been burnt if he had not been killed in a tavern brawl. Bacon, alive and awake as he was to the new horizons of knowledge opening around him, to his everlasting shame advised James I in favour of the burning of Bartholomew Legate in 1611. The attempt to enforce religious conformity in England by fire and faggot was ended by the temper of the people, "prone," says Fuller, "to asperse justice itself with cruelty" when its executants were the already detested bishops of the Stuart establishment.¹

The seventeenth century saw the first modern attempts to formulate a rational theory of political obligation. The theory that the basis of government was a contract between rulers and ruled, the breach of which by one party justified coercive action by the other, had been formulated by a few scholars of the later Middle Ages, and had been used by both Jesuits and Calvinists as a stick to beat monarchs of whom they respectively disapproved; but their main weapons had been theological. During the struggle of the English House of Commons against the rule of James I and Charles I it became common for parliamentary leaders to oppose to the divine right of kings an assumed "original contract between king and people," binding on the monarch and his subjects, and usually understood to bar such measures as monopolies, forced loans, taxation without consent of Parliament, and imprisonment without trial. The case of the Commons was theoretically weak, since there was in fact no such contract. But it was practically strong, since the country gentlemen and burgesses who controlled the Commons were not prepared to tolerate these restrictions on their freedom and were able, when it came to the point, to enforce their view by civil war.

Thomas Hobbes, a scholar and philosopher who made a living as tutor and secretary to the Cavendish family and had known Bacon and Galileo, tried in his *Leviathan* to turn the theory of the social contract against its upholders. The first great modern

¹ Fuller, *Church History of Britain*. The last sufferer, Wightman, was nearly rescued by the mob.

materialist, Hobbes regards bodies in motion as the only reality, man as a machine, and the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain as the only motives of action. Since man is by nature selfish, his natural state is a war of all against all, and his life under those conditions "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." To escape this misery men have contracted to surrender their liberties to a common power or government which shall enforce the observance of law. Since that contract cannot be annulled without plunging us back into anarchy, government has absolute authority. That is just or unjust which the Government declares to be so, and that faith is to be professed which the Government dictates. "Religion is superstition allowed; superstition is religion disallowed."

As no science of anthropology yet existed, Hobbes' argument was wholly *a priori*. His social contract is as mythical as that of his opponents. The English Revolution was fought out with other weapons than these. In order to defeat the King and the bulk of the nobility, the Commons had to arm and drill those yeomen and petty tradesmen who had been the vanguard of the Reformation in the previous century, and who since then had been thinking for themselves on the limited data at their disposal. They were not trained philosophers like Hobbes; but they had what he had not, a direct acquaintance with the hard business of life, and they knew that the alternative to autocracy was not a war of all against all. They denied the right of any earthly authority to prescribe their opinions, held with Milton that "new presbyter is but old priest writ large," and after victory was won, frightened the Commons out of their wits by putting forward in the *Agreement of the People* the first modern programme of political democracy and liberty of conscience. More truly than Latimer or Ridley, the Levellers can claim to have lit a candle in England and in the world which shall never be put out. Milton, though not of the Levellers, refused to write against them, and contributed greatly to the growth of the modern spirit by his plea for the liberty of unlicensed printing. Without national arrogance we may say that in the seventeenth century England led the world in the struggle for progress.

Across the narrow seas in the merchant republic of Holland a young Jew, Baruch Spinoza, a grinder of lenses by trade, was getting into trouble with the Amsterdam rabbis by his undue interest in Western science and philosophy, particularly in the

writings of Bruno and Descartes. Expelled from the synagogue and cut off from his people, Spinoza became the greatest philosopher Jewry had produced since Philo. His trade as an optician brought him into touch with the astronomer Huygens (the discoverer of Saturn's ring) and through him with the newly incorporated Royal Society of London and with the latest developments of experimental science. Identifying God with nature, Spinoza disguises in theistic terminology a form of materialism which reduces all finite beings to modes of one substance, and human freedom to the recognition of necessity. The man who by studying nature (including human nature) rises to this recognition attains, says Spinoza, peace of mind and is above hatred, ridicule, anger, envy, and the fear of death. Such a philosophy, though strong on the theoretical, is weak on the practical side. Its consequences in Spinoza's own case were seen when, in 1672, Louis XIV, in alliance with Charles II of England, began hostilities against Holland. The Dutch Republic crumpled under the double attack, and French soldiers overran the country. So "above the battle" was Spinoza that he accepted an invitation from Condé, the French commander, to visit him at Utrecht, though declining his offer of a pension. On returning to the Hague he was regarded as no better than a French spy and had to keep to his lodging. Spinoza's was a noble philosophy; and those who think Jews incurably avaricious would do well to remember the honourable poverty in which he lived and died. But something less aloof was needed in a world where freedom had still to be defended by carnal weapons.

The new science, as Bacon foresaw, was "producing worthy effects." Man was beginning to control nature, and, in proportion as he did so, was ceasing to believe in occult powers and miraculous interventions. Deism was in the air, and so long as it was confined to the upper ranks of society, and did not threaten to unsettle the masses, was safe from the interference of the law. Shaftesbury, the leader of the Whig opposition to Charles II, is said by Burnet to have remarked that all sensible men were of the same religion, and, being asked what that was, to have replied: "No sensible man tells." A greater man than Shaftesbury, his secretary, John Locke, lived to see the Revolution which finally established parliamentary government and a limited religious toleration in England, and to restate the theory of the social contract in the light of these events. Although formally a Chris-

tian, Locke bases the arguments both of his political and of his philosophical works wholly on rational considerations. Just as in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he sweeps away all supposedly "innate" ideas of God and morality and seeks to build up human knowledge on the foundation of sense and reason, so in the *Letters on Toleration* he urges the uncertainty of contending dogmas and pleads for a comprehensive national religion sufficient, but no more than sufficient, to promote social order, and in the *Treatises on Government* argues for the right of subjects to get rid (as the English had done) of a government which attacks the liberties it was set up to defend. As the seventeenth century passed into the eighteenth, the changed temper of the age showed itself in the gradual cessation in Protestant countries of trials for witchcraft, not because the evidence for witchcraft differed in quantity or quality from that available before, but because there was no room in the same brain for such beliefs and for the scientific picture of the world now being built up by such men as Locke, Newton, and Leibnitz.¹ In Catholic Europe trials and executions for witchcraft did not cease till late in the eighteenth century, and in Latin America they seem to have lasted until the nineteenth.

But Protestant progress was only relative. Compared with the France of Louis XIV or the moribund empire of Spain, the England of Locke and Newton and the Holland of Huygens and Spinoza were free and enlightened; but by any standard which we should accept they were dens of darkness. Both countries did in the long run a service to civilization by breaking the Iberian monopoly and opening the ocean to the ships of all nations; but their immediate motive was to corner for themselves the highly lucrative trade in Oriental products and especially in Negro slaves. Rivalry in this nefarious traffic was a main cause of the Anglo-Dutch war of 1665. The Treaty of Utrecht, in 1713, gave a British company a thirty years' contract for the exclusive supply of slaves (4,800 annually) to Spanish America, and the resultant orgy of share-pushing caused the South Sea Bubble. But the supply of slaves to British colonies was by itself remunerative enough to satisfy reasonable cupidity. The number of Negroes

¹ The last trial for witchcraft in England was in 1712; but the victim was not executed. The last execution in Scotland was in 1722. The laws against witchcraft were repealed in 1736, much to the scandal of the Scottish Kirk and of John Wesley.

shipped across the Atlantic averaged twenty thousand a year—seven thousand to Jamaica alone. In 1732 Parliament enacted that in case of a planter's bankruptcy his Negroes might be sold up like other chattels and pass to new owners regardless of family ties. Slave risings were put down with a ferocity worthy of ancient Rome: the punishments inflicted in the West Indies included burning at the stake, roasting in a slow fire, and gibbeting alive.¹ Fortunately there had grown up in most Western countries since the later Middle Ages a tradition of free industry strong enough to confine slavery to the colonies, and in the end to outweigh the interests of planters and merchants and to provide the necessary backing for an abolitionist movement.²

The founders of the Royal Society aimed not only at the organization of knowledge, but at the improvement of agricultural and manufacturing processes. During the eighteenth century the rotation of crops, the Enclosure Acts, the steam-engine, the blast-furnace, and the cotton mill, initiated that series of changes from small-scale to large-scale production and distribution called the Industrial Revolution, of which the final outcome has yet to be seen. This movement, as it developed, led to new and momentous tensions—social, political, and moral; but its first effect was immensely to increase man's power over nature and to reinforce the rationalist and utilitarian ideology which goes with such power. In Britain this showed itself in the easy-going deism or scepticism fashionable in the wealthier classes throughout the eighteenth century. In Catholic Europe, however, the clergy and nobility were still in the saddle, and the political changes effected here by the Reformation and the Revolution had still to be carried out before the bourgeoisie could enter into their heritage. In the hands, therefore, of such thinkers as the French Encyclopaedists rationalism assumed a more militant form than in England. The *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire universel des arts et des sciences* (to give it its full name), produced by Diderot and D'Alembert between 1751 and 1765, and numbering Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Holbach among its contributors, is not primarily an attack on religion, but, as its title denotes, a dictionary of arts, sciences, trades, and technical terms. But it exalts scientific

¹ See the *Annual Register*, 1760, 1767, and 1768, for the grim particulars.

² The Society of Friends (whose tenets Lecky calls a "strange form of distorted rationalism") alone among Christian sects opposed the slave trade from the time of George Fox onward. Defoe, Samuel Johnson, and others were also exceptional in denouncing it.

knowledge and industrial progress, assumes freedom of enquiry, denounces torture, and asserts that the end of government should be the good of the governed. It was therefore treated as injurious to the royal authority and to religion, and suppressed. It was this suppression, together with such infamies as the judicial torture and murder of Calas, which converted Voltaire from an easy-going deist into a man with a mission. Thenceforth to him the Catholic Church was *l'infâme*. He remained, however, a deist and held that "if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him" for the sake of social order. Other Encyclopaedists went further than Voltaire. The *Système de la nature*, published in 1770, the joint work of Diderot and Holbach, denies the existence of God and reduces the universe to matter in motion; matter being defined as "everything which in any way affects our senses." Happiness is declared to be the end of life and of society, and education in enlightened self-interest the way to make good citizens.

The man who more than anyone else voiced the popular revolt against decadent feudalism was Jean Jacques Rousseau. A Genevese of Huguenot descent, a lower-middle-class adventurer living by his wits, Rousseau had neither the annihilating sarcasm of Voltaire, the tireless industry of Diderot, nor the Lucretian eloquence of Holbach. But he had roughed it more than they had, and he knew at first hand, as they could not, the misery of the majority under a regime which drained France of her resources in dynastic wars and brought her visibly nearer bankruptcy and revolution. In the *Contrat Social*, published in 1762, Rousseau, following Locke, argues from the origin of government in contract to the right of peoples to rebel against governments which violate that contract. As a constructive theory Rousseau's doctrine, like those of Hobbes and Locke, is weak; but as a destructive weapon against the effete autocracies of the eighteenth century it is masterly. Few might be able to follow his pedantic formulation of the clauses of the social pact or his fine-spun distinction between the "general will" and the "will of all"; but thousands could understand his demolition of the right of conquest and the divine right of kings, and could get by heart such sentences as "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains," or "So long as a people is compelled to obey and does obey, it does well; but so soon as it can shake off the yoke and does shake it off, it does better."¹

¹ Rousseau, *Contrat Social*, book i, chapter i, translated by Tozer.

The American Declaration of Independence, drafted by Jefferson and adopted by Congress in 1776, was based on Locke's theory of the social contract. The doctrine that all men are created equal, that they are endowed with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that to secure those rights is the sole purpose of government, came a little oddly from colonists who had exterminated over eighty thousand Red Indians in fifty years and who held half a million Negroes in abject servitude. By striking out of the draft Jefferson's denunciation of slavery, Congress showed that it did not conceive the terms of the Declaration to apply to coloured people.¹ Nevertheless these American colonists, in their determination not to be taxed, governed, or restricted in any way without their own consent, unfurled a standard of revolt far beyond the confines of America and produced effects far beyond their intentions. In 1789 national bankruptcy precipitated the French Revolution. The French bourgeoisie, fired by the liberal doctrines of Voltaire and Rousseau and the example of America, and backed by an overburdened and impoverished peasantry, grasped fiercely at the political power which had so long been beyond their reach, and through their representatives in the National Assembly promulgated a Declaration of the Rights of Man based, like the American Declaration of Independence, on the idea that the end of government is the preservation of the natural and inalienable liberties of all men. The French Assembly showed by its limitation of the franchise and its shilly-shallying on the question of colonial slavery that, like the American Congress, it took its own Declaration with a grain of salt. But appeals to first principles, once made, cannot be revoked. Out of the storm and stress of successive revolutionary struggles in England, America, and France the Stoic dream of human brotherhood was reborn.

The Zeno of the new Stoicism was Immanuel Kant. The grandson of a Scot who had migrated to Königsberg, Kant spent nearly the whole of his active life as a university teacher in that city. His main interest at first was natural science; and his early writings contain remarkable pioneering work on such topics as tidal action and the nebular hypothesis of the origin of the solar system. He was also deeply interested in the political

¹ Until the Civil War it was "actually penal, in the majority of the slave States of America, to teach a slave to read." Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe*, edition 1897, ii, 233.

events of his time and in full sympathy with the liberalism of Voltaire and Rousseau. This dual interest led him to essay the task of bridging what seemed to him the contradiction between the mechanical materialism of science and the moral freedom of man, and ended in the famous intellectual *tour de force* according to which, while theoretical reason forces us to think of everything as mechanically determined, practical reason assures us that we are in reality free moral agents with a self-evident duty of universal benevolence, and answerable to a God who (Kant held with Voltaire) would have to be invented if he did not exist.

Kant's theory suffers from all the defects of an armchair philosophy. Were the dictates of practical reason as universal as he thinks, the world would be a far simpler place to inhabit. As it was, history refuted him under his very nose. The practical reason of Kant led him to approve the French Revolution. The practical reason of Edmund Burke, on the contrary, led him to see in the uprising of the French people a threat to property and social order everywhere, and to discover previously unsuspected merits in the dead "age of chivalry." The practical reason of Thomas Paine led him trenchantly to answer Burke in *The Rights of Man*.¹ The practical reason of the rulers of Austria and Prussia led them to identify the cause of the French monarchy with their own; and the practical reason of the French led them to dethrone and guillotine a king whose complicity with the foreign enemy was a national menace. In 1793 the Prussian Government, angry at the publication of Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Pure Reason*, forbade him to write or lecture on religious subjects. The old man was broken by the blow and before very long gave up his chair. The long duel between feudal Europe and the French Revolution needed other weapons than his.

The Industrial Revolution, in fact, was not only rapidly antiquating the whole social and political order of the eighteenth century, but was creating problems which the philosophies of Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Kant could not solve. The growth of the factory system in Britain was concentrating huge populations in towns like Birmingham, Sheffield, and Manchester

¹ Burke's misplaced slobber over Marie Antoinette is deftly disposed of by Paine. "Mr. Burke pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird." Yet there are some who think that the last word on the Revolution was spoken by Burke!

and making England the workshop of the world. Adam Smith had expounded the new economics of *laissez-faire*; and Jeremy Bentham, influenced by the Encyclopaedists, was subjecting civil and criminal law and the British constitution itself to the utilitarian test of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." The divergence of interest between the new industrialists and the existing oligarchy of landowners and burgesses led to a demand for parliamentary reform. For a time the alarm of the propertied classes at the success of the French revolutionary armies caused them to treat all such demands as treasonable or seditious. The effect of repression, however, was only to aggravate the dangerous mass of misery and disaffection which unregulated industrialism had brought into being. The wealthier classes, frightened out of their deism by the French Revolution, had no remedy for popular discontent except to refurbish as a bulwark of social order those dogmas of "revealed" religion which had been obsolescent since the Renaissance and whose revival now was an index of intellectual bankruptcy. Robert Owen, who rejected all existing religions, almost alone among employers advocated factory legislation and universal education as a means of producing good citizens, and later became one of the pioneers of modern Socialism. Meanwhile Napoleon's armies and administrators were redrawing the map of Europe, sweeping away feudalism and serfdom in the countries under their control, and preparing the way for those liberal movements which, after Waterloo, confronted the conquerors of Napoleon and finally buried the old regime.

The settlement of the conflicts arising from industrialism still lies in the future. The central conflict, that of capital and labour, is in one sense as old as capitalism itself: laws forbidding combinations of workmen are met with in medieval history. But with the Industrial Revolution labour movements became endemic, and manifested themselves first in the destruction of machinery (deemed to be the immediate cause of unemployment and wage-cuts) and then in the formation of illegal unions. During the slump which followed Waterloo, Owen in Britain, and Saint-Simon and Fourier in France, independently propounded the view that competitive capitalism was the cause of the prevailing maladjustments, and advocated the co-operative organization of labour as a remedy. All three looked for the voluntary adoption of their plans by beneficiaries of the existing order, and were naturally disappointed. Capitalism was expanding in a world as

yet industrially undeveloped; slumps, though unpleasant, were soon over; and few even among advanced reformers thought that anything was essentially wrong with the system.

The industrial development of the world was necessarily uneven. While the factory system was well established in Britain and was spreading to France, it had hardly scratched the surface of the rest of Europe. The liberal movements in Germany and Italy were concerned primarily with political unity, without which further economic progress was difficult. The prevalent philosophy therefore tended to be idealistic—to concentrate its attention on man and to treat the natural world with unscientific impatience. Hegel could, during a tour in the Alps, pronounce “these eternally dead masses” monotonous and tedious, and could call the stars “eruptive spots on the face of the sky.” Yet Hegel deserves to stand intellectually beside Bruno and Spinoza. He is the first modern to apply the theory of evolution (albeit in an idealistic dress) to human affairs. Of organic evolution, as later expounded by Darwin, he had no conception; but his view of the world as an interaction of opposites provided a framework into which Darwinism and much else could be fitted when the time came. Like Kant, Hegel bases his ethics on the subordination of inclination to reason. Reason, however, means to Hegel, not the dictates of the individual conscience, but the interests of the social group (family, city, State) to which the individual belongs. In his early liberal period he regards the ideal State as something yet to be created; but after his appointment in 1818 as professor of philosophy at Berlin he treats it as already realized in Prussia and goes over bag and baggage to the reactionaries—an unedifying end to a great beginning.

Meanwhile the liberal movement which Hegel had deserted was conquering the Western world. Independent States rose in Latin America on the ruins of Spanish and Portuguese imperialism. Greece, after an enslavement of two thousand years, became a nation again. In France the attempt of the restored Bourbons to govern “by priests, through priests, for priests” and to muzzle Parliament and the Press led to the July Revolution and a bourgeois monarchy. In Britain public opinion forced a gradual modernization of the barbarous criminal law (the French had already overhauled theirs after their first Revolution); and a reformed Parliament bought out the colonial planters and ended slavery—an example soon followed by other colonial powers.

Profits accumulated in industry were invested in mines, railways, canals, docks, and other enterprises all over the world. British rule in India, which had arisen in the eighteenth century out of a scramble between British and French merchant adventurers for trade and loot, in the nineteenth underwent a change. British administrators abandoned the crude methods of plunder which had disgraced the early days of Company rule and began to prohibit *suttee*, suppress Thugs, build railways, and to an increasing extent westernize and industrialize India, preparing the way unwittingly for the Indian nationalism of to-day. In America the industrialization of the North led to that sharp antagonism between slave and free States which was to end in the Civil War and in the opening of the whole of that great country to free enterprise. As the century advanced, science and invention enabled the means of life to be produced and transported to the ends of the earth on a scale never known before. The spirit of the age breathes in the buoyant optimism of the early Tennyson.

“Men, my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping something new:
That which they have done but earnest of the things that they shall do:
For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;
Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales; . . .
Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furled
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.”¹

Liberal optimism was criticized from two sides: by those who did not share its aspirations, and by those who, sharing them, did not believe that they could be realized along the lines of *laissez-faire*. Critics of the first order, represented in England by Newman and his Oxford following, need not detain us. Attempts to lead the modern world back to the Middle Ages will always fail. Critics of the second order were more formidable. The working classes could not be expected to take the same view of the situation as their employers, and least of all in the “hungry forties.” In Britain trade unions had been legalized in 1824; but since at common law they were conspiracies in restraint of trade, their rules could not be enforced nor their funds protected. In France they were altogether illegal till much later. The July Revolution in France, and the Reform Act of 1832 in Britain, had left the workers of both countries unen-

¹ Tennyson, *Locksley Hall* (date 1842).

franchised. The first real Factory Act (i.e., the first which provided inspectors to enforce it) was passed in Britain in 1833, but fell far short of the demands of factory reformers and was amended in 1844 only under pressure from Chartist agitation. The mining industry, in which small children worked all day under horrifying conditions, escaped State interference until 1842. No country other than Britain, except the State of Massachusetts in the American Union, had passed any labour legislation at all. It is not surprising, therefore, that in Britain and France, the two leading industrial countries, demands should have been made not only for universal suffrage, but for a reorganization of society on a Socialist basis.

Apart from the Owenites and Chartists, the most trenchant British critic of *laissez-faire* liberalism was Thomas Carlyle. Early struggles with poverty and chronic ill-health made him intolerant of complacency, and study of German philosophy of the Kantian school inclined him to a mystical radicalism. Unfortunately he never became a disciplined thinker, and he allowed his impatience to degenerate into a contempt for mankind. Thus from a sympathetic historian of the French Revolution and a champion of the Chartists he became by degrees a defender of Negro slavery, an apologist of Eyre's Jamaican atrocities, and an admirer of Prussian militarism. A more systematic critic of liberalism than Carlyle was his French contemporary, Auguste Comte, whose *Positive Philosophy* is notable as an attempt, however imperfect, to put sociology on a scientific basis. Comte seeks the key to social evolution in intellectual development, which he tends to isolate from the material foundation that makes it possible. His ethics, therefore, like Kant's, take too little account of the actual conditions under which life is lived, and bear the stamp of an armchair philosophy. John Stuart Mill, who was influenced by both Carlyle and Comte, was a greater man than either. Brought up by a doctrinaire father in the strictest principles of Benthamite *laissez-faire*, he was led progressively to modify that position and ended as what would now be called an evolutionary Socialist. The contradictions which many have detected in his writings are due to the fact that his mind, like the world about him, is in a state of transition. Mill has not quite grasped the dependence of moral principles on material conditions, and his ethics are therefore in the main still abstract; but his recognition that "wherever there is an ascendant

class, a large portion of the morality of the country emanates from its class interests and its feelings of class superiority" shows how near he is, without knowing it, to the position of historical materialism.¹

In 1844 a young German-Jewish journalist living in Paris, by name Karl Marx, made the acquaintance of a young German business man living in England, by name Friedrich Engels. Both were Rhinelanders; and both were Hegelians "of the left"—that is, they endorsed Hegel's theory of development by the interaction of opposites, but not his idealization of the Prussian State or his lip-service to Lutheran Christianity. Both had come to the conclusion that the cause of progress was bound up with that of the working-class movements then agitating England and France. The two men joined forces; and the result was the revolutionary philosophy known as Marxism, though the respective contributions of Marx and Engels cannot in fact be separated. Up to a point Marx and Engels take over the materialism of the French eighteenth-century philosophers, Diderot and Holbach. All that is is a manifestation of matter. Man's thoughts and volitions spring, not from a spiritual world apart from matter, but from the material world itself. Before men can think they must live—that is, they must get food, drink, clothing, shelter, and the other essentials of life. So far Marx and Engels echo the older materialists; but now their distinctive contribution begins. Man, they point out, reacts upon and changes the world to which he belongs; and ideas and institutions are part of the equipment by which he does so. The property relations prevalent in a society depend on the stage of development of its productive forces or tools; and the legal, political, religious, and other ideas current in a society depend in their turn on its property relations. Hence there is no eternal and immutable moral law. At certain stages of development existing property relations are no longer a help, but a hindrance to economic progress. When that happens a period of revolutionary struggle begins, leading to a change in property relations, and finally to a change in the whole superstructure of society and to a new social order. Thus, when feudal property relations had become a hindrance to economic progress, the bourgeoisie overthrew feudalism, and free enterprise and competition became moral. When bourgeois property rela-

¹ Mill, *On Liberty*, chapter i (date 1859). There is no evidence that Mill was acquainted with any writings of Marx or Engels.

tions become a hindrance to further progress they will be overthrown by the working class, and Socialism will become moral. Morality is the code of behaviour which society imposes on its members. It may be represented to them as the voice of some eternal principle outside society; but this belief has no warrant in science. There is no arbiter between rival ethics except history itself as it unrolls.

The philosophy of Marx and Engels, being incidental to their political and economic attack on capitalism, had little immediate influence. The revolutionary movements of 1848 were not of their making, and except in Paris, were in the liberal and nationalist tradition. They soon gave place to European reaction. Britain still led the world in manufacture, and thanks to that fact, and to free trade, was able to weather the storm. The discovery of gold in California and Australia set business booming once more. The publication, in 1859, of Darwin's *Origin of Species* seemed to the defenders of free competition to provide a scientific justification for their position. Darwin himself was interested chiefly in proving the development of human characteristics, including morality, from an animal origin, and showed a judicious caution in applying his principles to contemporary society. Herbert Spencer had no such hesitation. An evolutionist before Darwin, and originator of the phrase "survival of the fittest," he saw in the struggle for existence a vindication of the *laissez-faire* Individualism of which he was a lifelong advocate. State establishment of religion, State regulation of commerce, State relief of the poor, State education, and even a public health service, are all alike condemned by Spencer as interferences with natural selection. Given the minimum of governmental interference necessary to protect liberty and property, he contends that nature will weed out the unfit and at last produce a condition of things in which men will be perfectly adapted to their environment and therefore healthy, happy, and wise. Spencer fails to see that the forms of State interference to which he objects are methods of adaptation to our environment as legitimate (from an evolutionary point of view) as those which he approves, and that his plea for Individualism is really a plea for anarchy. Given the struggle for existence, any human group will obviously use the weapons that suit it. Spencer's conclusions, in fact, do not follow from evolutionary principles. Marx, for his part, hailed the *Origin of Species* as providing "a basis in natural science for the class struggle in

history.”¹ T. H. Huxley, the great popularizer of Darwinism, though no Socialist, propounds the quasi-Hegelian view that the “cosmic process,” in the course of evolution, has given rise to an “ethical process” which is its negation.²

An important consequence of the Industrial Revolution has been its effect on the position of women. From the birth of civilization until modern times woman was normally dependent on, and therefore subject to, man. Man was the breadwinner and fighter, woman the childbearer and cook. This subjection was reflected in the double standard of sexual ethics and in the exclusion of women from political rights and from the educational facilities open to men. The family was the economic unit; and the head of the family was the man. The effect of the Industrial Revolution was to throw increasing numbers of women into the labour market in competition with men and so to break up the family as a productive unit. In due course economic pressure of the same kind as that which forced working women into the factory, though usually less acute, led daughters of middle-class families to seek careers of their own. This naturally led to a demand for equal status and for citizen rights. The *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792 by Mary Wollstonecraft, is universally recognized as the pioneer work in this field; but it produced little effect at the time. The Radical movement in England during the years after the Napoleonic wars stirred both sexes. Women reformers participated in the agitation which led to Peterloo. As yet, however, there was no wide demand for the vote, and even Chartist programmes did not go beyond manhood suffrage. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that higher education began to be opened to women, and not until well on in its second half that they began in any numbers to enter the professions and to demand political status. With the growing economic independence of women the double standard of sexual morality has become not only indefensible in theory, but unenforceable in practice. It would be rash to prophesy the outcome of an ethical transition still in progress. Conventions born of long patriarchal domination die hard, as the tumult provoked half a century ago by Ibsen's dramatic exposure of the maladjustment of traditional ideals to modern

¹ *Correspondence of Marx and Engels*. Marx to Lassalle, January 16, 1861.

² Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics*. Huxley does not seem to have read Hegel; but the coincidence in thought is striking.

life sufficiently showed. That they nevertheless die will be evident to anyone who compares the social code of fifty years ago with that of to-day. Promiscuity there is not, except in the imagination of certain clergy to whom every relaxation of their ascetic standard seems a short cut to the farmyard. But there is certainly a greater sexual freedom, a yet greater freedom of discussion, and a repudiation of inhibitions whose only basis is the patriarch's proprietary right in his womenfolk.

In the sixties of the nineteenth century the prospects of progress on liberal lines seemed to most British observers to be unclouded. At home, free trade and Factory Acts had allayed the bitter contents of the hungry forties, and "freedom slowly broadened down from precedent to precedent." Abroad, the unification of Italy by Cavour and Garibaldi was hailed as the birth of a free nation. The unification of Germany by Bismarck was viewed by average opinion with almost equal satisfaction. Yet to a discerning eye there were reefs below the surface—reefs made of iron and steel. During these years new countries were being industrialized, and Britain was ceasing to be the workshop of the world. The dominating feature of the closing decades of the last century was the scramble of the Great Powers for colonies, markets, and concessions in the industrially undeveloped regions of the earth. Such statesmen as Joseph Chamberlain and Cecil Rhodes, in Britain, and their opposite numbers in other countries, saw in imperial expansion the only way to raise the standard of living of the masses and to avert social upheaval.¹ The progress of industrialism has engendered a new contradiction—that between the growing economic unification of the world and the nationalist lines on which it is governed and on which the ordinary citizen is trained and educated.

One thing wanting to modern imperialism is a philosophy credible to an intelligent person. The most honest and thoroughgoing attempt ever made to provide one is that of Friedrich Nietzsche; and he made it at the cost of his reason. Starting his career as a professor of classics at Basel university, and totally isolated from the real business of life, he conceived a passionate enthusiasm for the ancient, and an equally passionate contempt for the modern world. As ancient culture was founded on

¹ This must not be confused with the Malthusian thesis which ascribes war to overpopulation. Tropical colonies are sought by white nations for many reasons, economic or strategic, but not usually as places to settle in.

slavery, he concluded that slavery was the necessary basis for any culture worth having, and attributed the "decadence" of modern society to the pursuit of freedom and equality. Nietzsche often passes (and likes to think of himself) as an arch-enemy of Christianity. But he is an enemy of Christianity only in so far as he sees in it a slave religion, originating in the resentment of the depressed classes of the ancient world and giving rise in its turn to democracy, humanitarianism, Socialism, and all that he hates in the world of to-day. As opium for the people—as a "means for overcoming resistance in the exercise of authority" and "teaching even the lowest to retain their satisfaction with the actual world in which they find it difficult enough to live"—Nietzsche finds Christianity and Buddhism useful and admirable.¹ For the positive side of his philosophy he invokes evolution. The essence of life is "will to power." Good consists not in happiness, but in strength. Evil consists not in pain, but in weakness. That is the "revaluation of values" which Nietzsche calls upon the world to make. The many must be enslaved that a few may achieve greatness. As the struggle for existence among animals evolved man, so the struggle for power among men will evolve "superman." That, for Nietzsche, is the reason why man exists.

British admirers of Nietzsche are at pains to clear him from the charge of having inspired Nazism. Certainly he is neither a German nationalist nor an anti-Semite. He calls himself a "good European." His writings are full of attacks on the Germans. But he attacks them for qualities which he considers weak—idealistic philosophy, long-windedness, nebulousity. Had he lived to see Germany make her bid for world dominion, it is not so certain that he would have disapproved. His call for "a new caste to rule over the Continent," and his declaration that "the next century will bring the struggle for the domination of the world," have a grimly familiar ring to-day.² If we take his philosophy as a whole, Nietzsche cannot be acquitted of having contributed to the ideology against which we have been fighting. He is the most candid exponent of power-politics since Machiavelli; and much of his attraction, as of Machiavelli's, lies in his candour.

Nietzsche, however, no more invented modern imperialism than

¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, chapter iii, translated by Helen Zimmern.

² *Ibid.*, chapter vi.

Machiavelli invented the Renaissance. The causes of the former, which have already been glanced at, lie deep in the economics of our time. Once begun, its tragedy had to be played out. The partition of Africa, the opening up of Asia, the military alliances and understandings thereby necessitated, and the mutual fear thereby engendered, were so many milestones to the first world war. The late Lord Rosebery, himself an imperialist, asked whether as a result of the race in armaments Europe would rattle back to barbarism or whether the workers of the world would revolt.¹ But the workers of the West had given hostages to imperialism. Colonial expansion, and even war preparation, up to a point, meant prosperity; and prosperity meant more employment, more wages, and more money for social reforms. Few wanted war; but few understood the way the world was going. Even Shaw, one of the clearest-headed Socialist intellectuals of that time and a masterly critic of educated ignorance and solemn humbug, never makes up his mind on this fundamental issue. He praises imperialism in South Africa and damns it at Denshawai; satirizes militarism in one play, and in another sees in "money and guns" the two things necessary to salvation; balances between Marx and Nietzsche, improves on both, and raises doubts whether he has fully understood either.

Few, whatever their political views, will now deny that the most important result of the first world war was the Russian Revolution. In an autocracy of eighteenth-century pattern, which had omitted to adapt itself to the industrial age, the governmental machine cracked under the strain of modern war, and a party built up on the principles of Marx and Engels seized power. Whether this event and those which followed from it—the translation of Marxism from theory into practice, the reorganization of the former Russian Empire on a Socialist basis, and the repercussions of this challenge in the labour movements of the West—have been for good or for evil, it does not lie within the scope of this book to determine. The upshot was the launching by predatory interests, to whom the unification of the world either on a Liberal or on a Socialist basis is equally repellent, of a murderous war both against the liberal West and against the Soviet Union, and as a corollary the drawing together of these in self-defence.

Practice teaches better than theory. If anyone had predicted,

¹ Speech at a banquet to Indian and Dominion press delegates at the White City, June 5, 1909.

twenty years ago, that the peoples of the British Empire, the Soviet Union, the United States of America, the Republic of China, and the other United Nations, would later be banded together in an alliance against Fascism, a hundred theoretical reasons would have been adduced to confute him. Yet it was so; and that alliance achieved victory. In co-operation for the rebuilding of the world which must follow may lie our moral education. We have learnt by bitter experience the meaning of evil: we have seen Huxley's "cosmic process" in the raw, Nietzsche's "will to power" in operation, and we have had to hold our noses. Perhaps in struggling against known evil we shall learn by contrast the meaning of good, and find, in the progress of the world towards unification, no drab and dull affair of "sophisters, economists, and calculators," but a dangerous and exciting adventure.

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CHAPTER X
CONCLUSION

IN our survey of world history it has become clear that morality is no absolute and eternal principle revealed to man by God, or innate in the mind as such, but a function of social groups, evolving as they evolve. In primitive society the group is the horde or tribe, and moral behaviour is that conducing to the survival of the horde or tribe in the struggle for existence. Civilized society is more complex. It originates with the integration of tribes into cities, and proceeds in due course to the integration of cities into kingdoms or empires. Civilized morality is therefore a tangled affair in which loyalties are liable to conflict—tribal loyalty with civic, civic with national. These conflicts are further complicated by the division of civilized society into classes—freeman and slave, lord and serf, rich and poor. Struggles between group and group—whether between cities, kingdoms, empires, or classes—are the stuff of history, and are accompanied by a struggle between rival moralities, leading at critical epochs in history to a radical “revaluation of values.”

In such conflicts it is entirely natural that the combatants should try to strengthen their respective positions by representing their moral code as the dictate of some being or principle greater than themselves. In early civilizations every city has its god; and in early war-songs and epics the god naturally does battle for his city. As cities unite into empires, the god of the ruling city naturally becomes the supreme god. As social conflicts develop within cities, the contending classes naturally reinforce their claims by bespeaking the support of their special god; and when such conflicts transcend the limits of the city and involve whole kingdoms or empires, the supreme god naturally enters the fray. In all these cases the god is a projection or personification of group-solidarity. It is not the god who creates the moral code: it is the struggling group which creates both the moral code and the god.

Thus the Jewish prophets reinforce their invectives against class oppression by uttering them in the name of Jahveh; and Jahveh, originally a mere tribal god like any other, changes his character

in the process till he becomes a personified social protest, the friend of the downtrodden and the enemy of whatever exploiter or conqueror happens to be ill-treating his people for the time being. But the commands thundered by the prophets in the name of Jahveh are none the less human and relative, rooted in the class interest of the poorer sections of Palestinian society for whom the prophets speak.

In three ancient civilizations we meet with systems of ethics which dispense with theological aid. They include Buddhism, Confucianism, and certain Greek philosophies. Of these only the last-mentioned are of permanent significance. Gotama, free-thinker though he is, turns his back on life and teaches his followers to do the same. He thereby renounces any effective future for his philosophy. The Buddhism which eventually sweeps the Far East is a supernatural religion having little in common with his teaching but the name. Confucianism, in spite of the scepticism of its founder, is essentially traditionalist, comes to terms easily with established cults, and in the course of centuries takes on itself the character of one. It is in Greece, among men relatively free from priestcraft and inclined by travel to critical inquiry, that we meet the first attempts to base a positive ethic on reason alone.

Of the Greek philosophers Plato stands, so to speak, on the extreme right. His main concern is to find a rational basis for Greek society, with its leisured aristocracy and its servile or semi-servile working class. His attempt breaks down, and he has in the end to call in God as the guarantor of social order. In contrast Epicurus stands on the extreme left. Equating pleasure with good, and pain with evil, he reduces morality to a means of attaining the one and avoiding the other. As on this showing Greek society has no moral basis, he turns his back on it and cultivates his garden. The Stoics, standing between these two positions, seek in the nature of things a basis for society as it might be made. Out of the weakness and collapse of the Greek city-state the dream of human brotherhood is born. But the conditions for its realization do not exist in a slave society. Even the Stoics are beaten by the Roman Empire.

Christianity is the classic example of an ethic claiming to derive from a wholly transcendental source. Originating among the poor and ignorant at the apogee of ancient slave civilization, Christianity, on the one hand, embodies the ethics of mutual aid

necessitated by the conditions of life in which it arose. Those ethics are by no means peculiar to it. On the other hand, coming on the scene just when it did, it sees in divine intervention the only way of escape from a world that has become hateful. This doctrine is two-edged. Desperate men may constitute themselves the agents of the divine will and organize revolt. But if revolt has been tried and crushed, the same doctrine may prove a stupefying opium. Christianity in its historic form has served that purpose. It has drugged the poor and ignorant with imaginary compensations in a life beyond the grave, and thereby helped to secure the interests in *this* life of rulers to whom, if they are honest with themselves, all religions are equally false and equally useful.

The pretence breaks down in the end. In the course of world development the dominance of the hierarchy becomes a fetter on progress, and opposition raises its head. At first heretics appeal to the Bible against the Church; then to the "inner light"; then (what is really the same thing) to reason. In each case the appeal is to an authority deemed to be absolute and eternal. But as man's control of nature advances, the assumed absolute and eternal authority grows more and more abstract and shadowy. The "word of God" invoked by the Protestant Reformers against popery drops into the background, and the "reason" invoked by the French Revolutionists against despotism takes its place. Finally reason is shown by biology and sociology to be no disembodied spirit independent of space and time, but a function of man in his social group, and its use to be strictly relative to the life of the group.

But what is the social group? Man's original group, the tribe, is in all civilized parts of the world as extinct as the dodo. The modern national State is not a tribe; and analogies drawn from one to the other are apt to be fallacious. The national States of modern Europe originated at most a few centuries ago (in many cases only a few decades) as a result of military and economic developments familiar to every historian. Most of them have a linguistic, but none a racial, unity. None have the solidarity of a tribe. We cannot imagine a tribe with contested general elections, permanent political parties, home rule movements, strikes and lock-outs, revolutionary agitations, or concentration camps. Moreover the military and economic development which called the national State into being is already ringing its knell. It came

into being because the rising merchant class needed a Government that could enforce peace over a wide area and were able to provide that Government with money and arms in order to do so. To-day the area of the national State has grown too narrow. The interests of industry, commerce, science, art, literature, and labour are international; and the resources at the disposal of modern Governments have made it impossible to guarantee the independence of small sovereign States in a world of power-politics.

The same causes, therefore, which long ago merged the tribe in the city-state or petty kingdom, and which more recently merged these small units into national States, are now working for the merger of national States into larger groupings and ultimately into a World State. The passage will not be smooth. We have already run into a severe squall. But no one with a knowledge of history can have expected a smooth passage. If there is such a thing as ignorant optimism, there is also such a thing as ignorant pessimism. It is common, for example, to blame "human nature" for evils of which we are too lazy to find out the real causes. It is a blessed phrase which enables us to sit back comfortably and excuse ourselves from doing anything about them. Now human nature is not the cause of war, except in that general and unhelpful sense in which it is equally the cause of cannibalism, slavery, gladiatorial shows, heresy-hunting, and witch-burning. All these things were once approved and enjoined by the morality of the time; and all these things have ceased to be approved and enjoined. War is still with us because the world, though economically and culturally unified more than ever before, is governed and educated on nationalist lines. But Governments are not almighty. They can be driven by public opinion. And on public opinion war itself has an educative effect. More people wished to end war in 1919 than in 1914. More do to-day than in 1919. Only certain sinister publicists, mainly in the U.S.A. and in the Roman Catholic Church, talk glibly of a third world war.

Once a unified world-order comes into being, the terms "moral" and "immoral" will for the first time in history have a universal and unequivocal meaning. The world-community will have the character of an organism in which human beings will be the cells, each living an individual life, but each fulfilling a function in the whole and finding his or her happiness in doing

so. In that community the various historical moralities, the "righteousness" of the ancient Egyptians and Jews, the "life according to nature" of the Stoics, the "kingdom of God" of the Christians, the "practical reason" of Kant, the "greatest happiness" of the Utilitarians, and the "free development of each and all" of the *Communist Manifesto*, will find their ultimate synthesis. But that day is not yet. The validity of an ethic based on the common interests of mankind depends on the power of those who believe in it to equate their right with might—to impose it over the dead bodies of those who, like the Nazis and Fascists, would divide humanity into *Herrenvolk* and submen. The world-community, like any other organism, must prove its fitness to survive in the struggle for existence against those who seek its life.

Nietzsche, in one of his best-known passages, scathingly caricatures the utilitarian ideal. "Then earth will have become small, and on it the last man will be hopping who maketh everything small. His kind is indestructible like the ground-flea; the last man liveth longest. 'We have invented happiness,' the last men say, blinking. . . . They still work, for work is an entertainment. But they are careful, lest the entertainment exhaust them. They no longer grow poor and rich; it is too troublesome to do either. No herdsman and one flock! Each willeth the same, each is equal. . . . 'We have invented happiness,' the last men say, blinking." ¹ Nietzsche's isolation from the world prevented him from seeing that to build up and to maintain from day to day, by appropriate economic, political, and educational planning, a world-community such as he caricatures would be a task calling for all the heroic qualities which he wished to see devoted to its defeat. The late war proved, if indeed it needed proof, that the will to freedom, equality, and brotherhood can inspire, to say the least, as great a courage and devotion as any vision of a superman; and its issue suggests that we are likely to fare better in the service of man, whom we have seen, than in that of the superman, whom we have not seen.

But on any showing we are voyaging into the unknown. Man's environment is changing rapidly: he is changing it himself, and changing himself in the process. The future is with those who are not afraid to make experiments and to run risks.

¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part I, translated by Tille.

"The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a better world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew . . .
. . . That which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
. . . Strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."¹

¹ Tennyson, *Ulysses*.

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